RECONNECTING WITH JOHN MUIR

essays in post-pastoral practice

TERRY GIFFORD

VISIT…

Reconnecting with John Muir

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ESSAYS IN POST-PASTORAL PRACTICE

Terry Gifford

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For my wife, Gill Round,
reconnector

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Reconnecting with John Muir

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CHAPTER ONE

Keeping Faith with the Source

Our postmodern age encourages each of us to think of multiple selves acting in different contexts—at home, at work, at leisure—negotiating positions on the dilemmas we face and the decisions we make, not with a coherent ideology, philosophy, or worldview, but with improvised versions of provisional positions. When we speak in this age, we apparently do so with the differently situated voices that make up the shape-shifting postmodern self. Yet this is also the age of holism, of the yearning for a sense of the self as a whole, of a drive toward the reintegration of the self with the natural world to counter postmodern instability and disconnection.

The word *holism* had to be invented in the early twentieth century (Merchant 1980, 292) to recover an ancient notion that Ted Hughes translated from the Latin of Ovid (43 b.c.–a.d. 17?) that sustained the Golden Age of Greek myth:

> This age understood and obeyed
> What had created it.
> Listening deeply, man kept faith with the source. (Hughes 1997, 8)

Nature as an organic whole used to include the human species because, as the twentieth-century translator knowingly puts it, our species used to be able to "listen deeply" to the information in the larger rhythms and local details of "the source." In the Golden Age our species knew and understood what had created it and recognized itself as a part of the holism of nature. In our postmodern age we dismiss this Arcadian image as an idealized pastoral myth. At the same time, however, we still recognize our need for a practice that will enable us to "listen," and we apply all our technological resources to the task of finding it, while often rejecting (or simply ignoring) any reports we receive from our listening scientists that would require changes in economic practices. But if we are to listen, we need to reclaim from idealization the notion of "holism" in pragmatic ways that will enable us to live our best (and continuously revised) guess at what it might mean to "keep faith with the source."

Postmodern Dilemmas

We live in an age that is concerned about the extent to which our species has contributed to the death of nature from activities that Ovid suggested began with "the Age of Iron" when "Earth's natural plenty no longer sufficed" (Hughes 1997, 12). We are aware that our species has materially altered nature, as Bill McKibben argued in his book *The End of Nature* (1990). At the same time, James Lovelock's Gaia theory (1979) has been used to argue that nature, as an organic biosphere that is not benign toward any one species, including our own, will adjust to the evolutions of parts of itself. Hence, there is a need to understand the dynamics of nature in which our lives are embedded. Both McKibben and Lovelock challenge anthropocentric notions of "harmony" and "balance." But there is also a need for a rigorous reexamination and pragmatic reclamation of these notions from cozy idealization. New senses of harmony and balance are precisely what our species needs to discover for itself in relation to nature's dynamics, as ecological economists such as Partha Dasgupta are now arguing (2005). At this point nonscientists can be forgiven their confusion as literary scholars, mediating contemporary ecology, offer wildly different versions of the dynamics of nature. For example, Glen Love (2003), following Joseph Carroll (1995), embraces an evolutionary biology that recognizes the emergence of universal features as a result of adaptation, while Dana Phillips (2003) reports that ecologists long ago abandoned Lovelock's systems approach to nature in favor of a less determinate evolutionary randomness.

Meanwhile, the global temperatures keep climbing, the poles melting, and the sea levels rising (for a sample of news from three hundred scientists see *Impacts of a Warming Arctic: Arctic Climate Impact Assessment*). We know that this is not good for us and that our environmental crisis is a cultural crisis that we need to confront. The British government's chief scientific advisor, Sir David King, has been instructed to stop saying that global warming is a more serious threat than terrorism (*Independent*, 9 March 2004), although the Pentagon has apparently been advising the Bush administration that climate change "should be elevated beyond a scientific debate to a U.S. national security concern" because it is recognized that this threat to global stability vastly eclipses that of terrorism (Michael Meacher MP, former minister for the environment, reviewing Mark Lynas's *High Tide* in the *Guardian*, 2004).

At the same time that environmental concern has become widespread in our culture an old debate has resurfaced in the postmodern form of challenging whether there is any meaning in the distinction between culture and

nature: "Postmodernism is what you have when the modernization process is complete and nature is gone for good" (Jameson 1991, ix). Carolyn Merchant argued persuasively in her book *The Death of Nature* (1980) that our species' subjugation and exploitation of nature, conducted by male Enlightenment scientists, also contained and exploited women within a mechanistic model of nature that sought to counter an assumed privileged essential connection between women and nature. Thus Merchant demonstrates that nature was always culturally conceived but in a manner that might be seen by other kinds of ecofeminists as based on a true and empowering assumption. The two early collections of essays by ecofeminists, *Healing the Wounds* (Plant 1989) and *Reweaving the World* (Diamond and Orenstein 1990), contained essays by "essentialist" ecofeminists who argue for traditional healing practices such as witchcraft, as well as essays by "material" ecofeminists who argue for women's equal rights to the control of material resources, especially in parts of the world where these are denied.

The question of what is nature and what is culture in the relationship between women and nature continues to be debated beyond ecofeminist circles, but the way in which nature is culturally constructed was vividly illustrated in a series of controversial essays edited by William Cronon in *Uncommon Ground* (1995). "Wilderness," Cronon argued, was entirely a product of culture, although "wildness" is apparently less so, being more recognizably closer to what is meant by "nature" in our culture. Efforts to close, or at least to clarify, the nature/culture dualism remain as much a priority for environmental historians and social scientists, as evidenced in the 1999 book edited by Conway, Keniston, and Marx, *Earth, Air, Fire, Water*, as for ecocritics, as demonstrated by the 2001 collection of essays edited by Armbruster and Wallace, *Beyond Nature Writing: Expanding the Boundaries of Ecocriticism*. More recently Dana Phillips, following Bruno Latour, has embraced "the matrix of nature-culture as a single phenomenon" (Phillips 2003, 39), although it is far from clear in what way this "isn't at all the same thing as nature-as-culture" (122). Readers of Phillips might be forgiven for thinking that ecocriticism might have reached a point of theoretical desperation here. This book attempts to clarify some ways in which nature is culture and culture is nature, as the following chapter explains.

But the relatively recent development of ecocriticism, or environmentally aware literary criticism, is itself a symptom of a concern that we face an environmental crisis at a point during the evolution of our species when the specialization of human inquiry into nature and culture have led to difficulties of dialogue between the furthest reaches of science and the arts, or as the editors of *Earth, Air, Fire, Water* would put it, between the disciplines

of technology and the humanities. Our problems are presented to us as in "the nature of CFCs" rather than in the "air," or in our daily domestic inputs into the air and their representation in the texts of novels, TV advertising, and environmentalists' tracts, for example. Those of us in the humanities who pay attention to the scientific debate over climate change know that we have the disciplines to contribute to an analysis of attitudes toward air in the everyday culture, where human responsibility is crucial to national social policy making. Indeed, ecocritics are attempting to listen to messages from the source that come from disciplines other than their own, making our best guesses as to which are the most accurate representations on which to take our practice forward. So we find Laurence Buell examining "toxic discourse" in our culture (2001, 30–54), Laura Dassow Walls finding the science embedded in the nineteenth-century writings of Henry David Thoreau (1995) and Ralph Waldo Emerson (2003), and literary critics like Love, Carroll, and Phillips debating the most appropriate way that the discipline of literary criticism might be informed by contemporary developments in ecology.

Ecocritical Symbiosis

AS LONG AGO as 1978 William Rueckert, who first coined the term *ecocriticism*, was arguing in his landmark essay "Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism" that we should not only learn about symbiosis in nature and our part in that dynamic but that we should practice it as literary critics and as teachers:

> To charge the classroom with ecological purpose one has only to begin to think of it in symbiotic terms as a cooperative arrangement which makes it possible to release the stream of energy which flows out of the poet and into the poem, out of the poem and into the readers, out of the readers and into the classroom, and then back into the readers and out of the classroom with them, and finally back into the other larger community in a never ending circuit of life. (Glotfelty and Fromm 1996, 121)

The university teacher facilitating the symbiosis Rueckert described here would be engaged in a series of interactions between reading, writing, and teaching, shifting between different discourses in doing so. Rueckert's essay gives some clues to what these might be if this teacher were Rueckert himself. It might begin with his reading the popular scientific discourse of Ian

McHarag's book *Design with Nature*, which would challenge him to ask, "As readers, teachers, and critics of literature, how do we become responsible planet stewards?" (114). This might lead him to choose to teach the poetic discourse of Walt Whitman's *Song of Myself*, a text upon which he might have written, in the discourse of literary criticism, on "The Complete Ecological Vision in *Song of Myself*." In the classroom his discourse would at times be that of a literary critic and at times that of a teacher encouraging dialogue between his students. Then there would be the discourse that he does not hear, but that he hopes takes place, in which his students negotiate with the larger community the questions engaged for them by *Song of Myself* and by the planet, mediated by Rueckert. Thus have the multiple postmodern roles and discourses of the reader, scholar, critic, and teacher been integrated in service to the sense of holism in our individual and globally interconnected lives that is required before we can become "responsible planet stewards." This is the symbiosis that this book explores in the work of one critic and teacher who has lately been reflecting on Rueckert's vision of ecocriticism. For Rueckert's reading of McHarg, substitute the reading of the works of John Muir. The source of challenge that kick-starts this cycle of symbiosis is located in a writer whose use of multiple discourses always felt its way toward a sense of holism and reconnection.

Symbiotic Practice: Reconnecting the Poet-Critic-Scholar-Teacher

Many ecocritics, who want to put their skills of literary analysis at the service of the environment by deconstructing our representations of it and debating the results, are also creative writers, scholars, and teachers. The academy in the United Kingdom tends to regard these as separate career paths. That one should not write about teaching in one's scholarship is taken for granted, as is the impersonal mode of expression. If you are a poet who is also publishing criticism of poetry you certainly must not publish your own poetry as part of the debate conducted in your critical writing. So we have not begun to ask questions like: "How does my criticism affect my poetry?" or "Does my experience of writing poetry provide some interesting questions for my scholarship?" There is still much doubt in the United Kingdom within English studies about whether poetry can be considered research. Even when such designation is allowed in certain contexts, there is then even more doubt about when the writing of poetry is not research.

Institutionally, clear separations of these activities tend to be rewarded in the academy in the United Kingdom. Doing something else "on the side" can be a bonus, but a single activity is largely what is rewarded, partly because university funding follows an assessment of the quality of each individual's research activity. In the United States there has always been more willingness to recognize writers as teachers, as critics, and as scholars. But, still, the questions go unasked when it comes to beginning to understand how one activity informs another qualitatively.

If our activities on behalf of the environment in this literary corner of our culture are informed by ecology, we will be encouraged to view these different literary activities more dynamically. If the questions raised by literature are to be pursued toward healing the separation of culture and nature, they should surely be pursued in multiple modes that feed off each other. Scott Slovic has invented the term *narrative scholarship* for writing that has integrated research and its personal impact on the scholar (Slovic 1994). It is written in a narrative that demonstrates the mutual feedback between personal experience, scholarship, and the practice of ecocriticism—that is, between reading, thinking, writing, and being in the world. John Tallmadge calls this "narrative criticism" in his essay "Toward a Natural History of Reading" (2000) and he points toward Ian Marshall's book *Story Line* (1998) as a model of the practice.

We live in an age that is suspicious of sentences that begin like this—universalizing with an assumed objective authority. With all our postmodern guards up, it can still be a relief to hear the writer say, "Hi, this is me, the writer, speaking," or rather, "Hi, this is me, the writer who has been speaking in the foregoing pages." It is time to turn to the first-person voice to tell another story of where this book has come from and where I hope it will go. Ian Marshall makes the point that postmodern cultural theory regards all activities as "situated" in the matrix of personal and social constructions (Marshall 1998, 8). In a similar spirit the following personal reflections on professional interconnectedness should not only situate the author's practice but also offer models for the relationship between the chapters in this book as they make connections with each other.

I started thinking about the connection between being a creative writer, critic, and a teacher of the craft when the poet Vicky Feaver, writing in the journal *Writing in Education* (Spring 2000), said that, for her, writing and the teaching of writing had to be regarded as separate things. Ironically, it has been the National Association of Writers in Education (NAWE), publisher of this journal, that has been instrumental in breaking down some of the professional separations between writing, teaching, criticism, and scholarship

in the United Kingdom. One mark of the success of this movement is that University College Chichester had the poet Vicky Feaver teaching a critical module on modern women poets as well as creative writing. Of course, I respected her own practical need to focus most intensely on her own writing having "put as much time and distance between me and the college as possible" (33). Me too. But I'd be alarmed if, after coming away from having fired up students to write poetry, I couldn't write poetry myself. I'd be disappointed if I couldn't share with them my own current struggle with the practice when we test out work in progress on each other. As an artist I need to keep practicing the craft after teaching it, just like my music and fine art colleagues.

Certainly I share Philip Gross's experience, expressed in the following issue of *Writing in Education* (Summer 2000), that I don't expect to write more than an "exercise" actually in the classroom because the priority has to be on the student experience. I can enhance that experience for them professionally and that's partly why I'm paid. But in the process, when I read something of my own work in progress, I hope they can identify, and learn from, my mistakes too. They are not necessarily my target audience, so I may not act on their observations, but it's a rigorous and supportive field I enter with them when we workshop work in progress. If I loftily ignore all they point out to me it is at my peril. I also have a monthly workshop with a long-established small group of published poets, and it's good for students to know this too and to follow this model outside the classroom if they choose.

So here are four cases in which I think my different professional activities as critic, scholar, teacher, and creative writer inform and feed off each other when these activities are at the service of raising environmental awareness.

Four Personal Case Studies

(1) *Scholarship-Writing-Teaching*

In the summer of 1989, at the beginning of editing what became two omnibus editions of John Muir's writing, I left the library where his papers are kept at the University of the Pacific, Stockton, California, and traced the journey he recounts in his book *My First Summer in the Sierra*. It was my first visit to America and to Yosemite National Park. When I returned home (and yes, before the teaching semester started) my notebooks flowered into the poem sequence *Ten Letters to John Muir* (which, along with three additional pieces, serve as the poems between the chapters of this book). In

the classroom I use an example or two from this sequence to consider, with master's students of creative writing, the dangers and possibilities of, as I put it, "updating a person from the past on a place they wrote about and that you too have visited." After the seminar, this becomes the challenge of an exercise for the students themselves. This is one session in the MA module I teach called "The Writer as Researcher," in which we discuss seven themes based on critiquing my own attempts to research sources of creativity, including conventional research for information. In each seminar, discussion of the issues and possible pitfalls in the case study is followed by an exercise I set at the end of the session. Here scholarship has stimulated the writing of poetry that has come to be used critically in the teaching process.

(2) *Writing-Researching-Teaching-Researching*

As writer-in-residence at the Earth Centre, an ecologically themed visitors' center near Doncaster, I was asked to write something for the planting of a sapling from a tree that had survived the atomic bomb in Nagasaki. I had to research the kaki tree, how it had been used as a balm for victims in immediate first aid, and why Tatsuo Miyajima, the sculptor, had combined with Masayuki Ebinuma, the "Tree Doctor," to initiate this project of planting saplings around the world as a symbolic act for peace. I kept a research journal for this project that encompassed my research, writing, and teaching. I was asked to create a planting ceremony with local children that would be based on their writing. So I taught poetry writing classes in the evenings at the Earth Centre for children and their parents. The final performance at the tree planting (in a Yorkshire snowstorm), with the two Japanese initiators present, was structured around the children's chanted rap. It included other individual poems by them, poems from older people in the community, and my own haiku (now translated into Japanese) (Gifford 2003, 80). I also wrote a poem for the Earth Centre's Web site, the form of which is devised for scrolling down a computer screen. So what began as a commission for new writing required informational research that informed teaching at the Earth Centre to produce material for the performance. Meanwhile creative research resulted in a new electronic form of poetry.

(3) *Criticism-Writing-Teaching-Scholarship*

For the Earth Centre Web site I also wrote an amulet. While writing *Ted Hughes: A Critical Study* (Gifford and Roberts 1981), I discovered the poem

"Amulet" first in Hughes's *Moonbells* (1978a). (It is now in *The Iron Wolf* [1995].) I have never since seen any other writer use the form. I stole that form and have used it for very different poems of my own: for example, the personal anguish of "Autumn Amulet" in *Outcrops* (Gifford 1991, 23) and the "green" issue–based poem "Island Amulet" in *Whale Watching with a Boy and a Goat* (1998, 52). So what is this form? At its simplest it works like this: the last word of each line is the first word of the next line, and the last line is the same as the first line. It's an ecological form of poetry in that it explores connections and is cyclical, and I use it for the outdoor workshops I run for Wigan schools in the English Lake District. This weekend environmental writing project is described in detail in chapter 4, but the point here is that a form used in teaching that turns out to be useful for exploring ecological linkages was discovered through writing literary criticism. In fact, the whole project is informed by my scholarship in ecocriticism exploring theoretical concepts such as, for example, Patrick Murphy's "inhabitation" of place (Murphy 1995, 97), or Len Scigaj's "référance" idea about our need for a language that refers to real things (Scigaj 1999, 38). So a form discovered in the process of criticism has been explored creatively and this writing used as a model for teaching that, in turn, is informed by ecocritical scholarship.

(4) *Teaching-Criticism-Scholarship-Teaching-Writing*

At the age of eighteen I knew that I would not get good enough grades in my two A-levels to enter the university. So, after leaving school in Cambridge to pursue three years of excellent training at Sheffield City Training College to be a teacher, I found that I had a teaching certificate (Cert. Ed.) but not the magic passport of a degree. As a result, in my first teaching job, I was not allowed to teach A-level students. I was a nongraduate in a two-tier profession of graduates and nongraduates. But I began my twenty years as a high-school teacher in those invigorating days of the late sixties, when radical reforms were being pioneered in coursework assessment at GCSE and A-level. After experience in several schools, I became both a teacher and a writer about teaching. I wrote about the teaching of literature and creative writing, first for the National Association for the Teaching of English (NATE), then chapters for books, culminating in a collaborative book with John Brown—ironically, since I'd first been prevented from teaching A-level—the first in its field: *Teaching A-Level English Literature: A Student-Centred Approach* (Brown and Gifford 1989). At the same time, I was developing as a Ted Hughes critic, having written a thesis on Hughes during a

year's secondment to the University of Lancaster to convert my teaching certificate to a bachelor's of education. Eventually, with Neil Roberts, who supervised my part-time study toward submission of a master's thesis, we cowrote the book *Ted Hughes: A Critical Study* (Gifford and Roberts 1981). I then started to look wider and backward at other writers' notions of nature in their poetry. This developed into the part-time doctoral research that led to the book of criticism that first suggested the need for a recognition of a "post-pastoral" literature—that which avoids the closed circle of both "pastoral" idealized celebration and the "anti-pastoral" simple correction of it (*Green Voices: Understanding Contemporary Nature Poetry*, 1995a). In this way, my incipient ecocriticsm on the work of Ted Hughes has led directly to the theoretical work that has evolved the conceptual tool of "post-pastoral" (explained fully in chapter 2).

By the time I was teaching in higher education, at Bretton Hall College of the University of Leeds, there was an opportunity to explore ecocriticism with students. Whatever the actual module title (but fulfilling the required objectives), I always devised a course that would have been, in effect, a response to Glen Love's challenge to American literary critics in 1990: "Why are the activities aboard the *Titanic* so fascinating to us that we give no heed to the waters through which we pass, or to that iceberg on the horizon?" (Glotfelty and Fromm 1996, 229). Of course, literature that imaginatively engages with this question is that which ecocriticism seeks out and evaluates. The integrated vision of the post-pastoral is intended to provide some criteria for that evaluation, and in doing so it also provides a challenge to new writing. Chapter 8 outlines one way in which the post-pastoral has influenced my teaching of creative writing at Bretton Hall, now the campus for students pursuing creative writing degrees at the University of Leeds. But the post-pastoral is also a challenge to me as a writer. I, of all people, cannot publish sentimental pastoral or mere landscape poetry, never mind mere nature poetry. When I offer my own work in progress to the student workshop, I'll expect it to be judged by my own standards of criticism. Criticism is a tool for writers, after all. It is what we do for each other as we take on the role of readers for each other's writing. Indeed, looking back on my own natural history of integrating criticism, scholarship, teaching, and writing, I find it hard to separate them. Instead I see only the way they have influenced each other.

When I concluded my book of criticism *Green Voices* with a poem of my own, I was roundly condemned by some reviewers. I had thought I was putting my creative effort on the same line as my critical effort. I accepted

the risk. Some silent readers may have had a moment at the end of the book where they wondered some interesting thoughts. I suppose I'll never know. But I have no regrets about offering the implication that all that thinking about my reading might have led to at least one poem that might sit alongside it as a small reflective code in a different discourse.

And I am doing it again throughout this book. As I've mentioned, the creative thread running through this book is provided by thirteen poems that are addressed to John Muir, updating him on thirteen locations about which he wrote over a hundred years ago.

Muir, Mountains, and Reconnection

Over the last decade, while researching the work of John Muir through regular visits to the archives and landscapes of America, I have been teaching creative writing in the United Kingdom. I have also been publishing literary criticism that has increasingly been influenced by recent developments in ecocriticism. At the same time, the notion of the "post-pastoral" that I have been evolving theoretically has provided a challenge to my writing of poetry. Reflected in each of these activities is my compulsion to regularly engage with the mountain environment by going rock climbing and mountaineering at a modest level. This has led me to ask again what Muir meant by the enigmatic simplicity expressed in his assertion that "going to the mountains is going home." The opening chapters of this book explore the extent to which John Muir's multiple modes of activity as botanist, glaciologist, arborist, writer, mountaineer, world traveler, fruit grower, and campaigning conservationist all informed each other and the way his holistic sense of the world provided the basis for his proto-ecological vision. Muir reintegrated the separate career paths of his time as a scientist, poetic popular writer, and activist. Similarly, his sense of the universe, which we now call "environment," was based on images of interconnection implicit in his favorite words for the dynamics of nature: "flowing," "balance," "harmony." In the multiple discourses of his writing, Muir reintegrated culture and nature in order that each should serve the other, just as the ecologist in him served the conservationist and the conservationist used the literary skills of the lyrical prose writer.

This book uses John Muir as a symbol of integrated knowledge and multiple modes of discourse that challenges our times. But this book is not so much about how writing and reading inform life experiences as

about how reading, researching, teaching, and writing can be seen to inform each other in the activities of an ecocritic aware of the dangers of idealization of environment in literature. This might be called "the practice of the post-pastoral"—a cultural practice that seeks to reconnect our species and its home, reconnects our practical literary activities to help us represent John Muir's notion of a right relationship with nature that is hopefully not utopian in the idealized sense. This is the search for a relationship that serves both culture and nature.

So John Muir is the iconic figure at the center of this book; mountains provide the environmental context of each of its chapters. Chapter 2 reveals that in some ways Muir is a contentious rather than a comfortable choice as a central figure. But it is Muir's holistic proto-ecological vision that provides a challenge to contemporary ecocritics, requiring them to consider what challenges his example offers their own scholarship, criticism, teaching, and poetry writing, concerned as his works are with making post-pastoral representations of environment, and mountains in particular.

Chapter 3 sets out to discover the multiple discourses used by Muir to explore his post-pastoral vision in his writing. I ask why Muir declined to become a professional scientist when he clearly was contributing to a wide range of scientific knowledge and theory in nineteenth-century American culture. I also question how his integrated approaches make a contribution to our environmental thinking today. In chapter 4, these integrated approaches are applied in a pedagogical project in the Lake District. There, a residential weekend with primary school children raises awareness of environmental values through interviews and group presentations, as well as narratives and poetry. I explore the pastoral dangers of withdrawing to a "beautiful" mountain environment to teach environmental values.

Muir may have been the nearest thing to an American Ruskin, but he might have publicly denied that this was a compliment. Chapter 5 looks in some detail at Muir's mode of reading of Ruskin, finding the evidence suggests that Muir might have taken more from his reading of Ruskin into his own writing than he cared to admit, and that Ruskin's influence led to a natural evolution of thought leading directly to the formation of national parks.

Chapter 6 attempts to develop an original mode of reading that is informed by post-pastoral reconnection. Here, Rick Bass's *Fiber* (1998), a book that has broken the ossified mold of American nature writing, is read as a "post-pastoral georgic." *Fiber* reconnects art and activism on behalf of a

mountain landscape as it meditates on the inadequacies of both modes of working to save it. Part storytelling and part advocacy, *Fiber* is perhaps a contemporary form of Muir's preference for moving between discourses and relationships with his readers.

Narrative scholarship has already been mentioned as a very recent example of the practice of using multiple modes of discourse to inquire into the meanings of real engagements with actual environments. Chapter 7 discusses recent books by Rebecca Solnit, Ian Marshall, John Elder, and British nature writer Richard Mabey that define this new mode of inquiry. Once again the example that is set by Muir's subjectivity in the communication of his scientific discoveries and his uses of his reading of the works of others in order to read his own relationship with landscape informs a reading of these contemporary reconnecting writers.

In chapter 8 the pedagogical implications of narrative scholarship are explored in terms of teaching the writing of a poetry that results from direct engagement with place. Documented here is a case study of a university field trip designed to allow personal examination of the ways the culture constructs an English national park in the mountain habitat called the "Lake District." This leads to the writing of twenty-five different kinds of landscape poetry that address the questions raised by the post-pastoral.

Chapter 9 is a form of narrative scholarship. It uses a personal history—of my receiving the novel *Cold Mountain* by Charles Frazier (1997)—to form a framework for reading the role of environment in that novel. A post-pastoral focus on the novel reveals new insights into what may be, following Anthony Minghella's film (2003), widely regarded as a romantic, pastoral book.

Muir's notion of himself as a mountaineer is explored in chapter 10. A fourfold vision underlay Muir's use of this term about his activities in the mountains. As chapter 3 argues to be the case for science, our increased technical specialization in mountaineering has lost Muir's deep sense of what it might mean to be fully and responsibly at home in the environments with which we engage. Drawing from Muir's fourfold vision of himself as a mountaineer, and examining British mountaineering writing, chapter 11 reveals the need for a post-pastoral practice in the writing of mountaineering literature, especially considering the current open opportunities for climbing writers to publish in outdoor magazines. A reflection on the reasons for mountaineering-magazine editors' suspicion about poetry leads to an analysis of the historical divisions and tensions in the culture of writing about

mountaineering in the United Kingdom in relation to the United States. Practical advice on writing articles for the outdoor press is provided in appendix C.

As an epilogue, chapter 12 engages briefly with some recent critiques of ecocritical practice by Michael Cohen (2004), Dana Phillips (2003), Greg Garrard (2004), and Lawrence Buell (2005) and argues that this book, in seeking to exemplify a post-pastoral practice, offers a response to their most valid criticisms and recommendations for ways forward. Central to this response is the belief that the professional lives we actually live are bound with separations we should resist in our educational work, our different modes of writing, and the way we learn from the multiple activities of each other in our transatlantic community of cultural activism and exchanges.

For the teacher is the writer, is the critic, is the scholar, is the human being, is the neighbor of other organisms, is a small part of our biosphere home. Only reconnect. And in going to the mountains as a whole person, could we find that, as John Muir promised, going to the mountains would not just feel like going home, but actually be going home? What follows is an attempt to answer that question through the reconnection of scholarship, criticism, pedagogy, and creativity conducted as post-pastoral practice.

CHAPTER TWO

Muir as Practitioner of the Post-Pastoral

On a May morning in 1903 two men pose for a photograph at Glacier Point above Yosemite Valley in the heart of the Sierra Nevada of California. They have slept the night in the open and have woken under a blanket of four inches of snow. Down in the valley a banquet is being prepared for them, together with fireworks and a light show to be projected onto the three-thousand-foot-high granite walls. Up here, in the clear morning air, they are escaping all that. They pose for a camera, nevertheless, perhaps with a sense that this could be an important moment for the landscape behind them. It is certainly a turning point in the history of American conservation, one that will also have repercussions around the world.

I like to ask audiences in England which of the two men in this photograph is the president and which is John Muir. (In Scotland now, they might be able to recognize their own John Muir, born in Dunbar, forty kilometers east of Edinburgh, in 1838.) Is it this stocky figure in riding breeches with the neckerchief knotted loosely in the style of a frontiersman? Or is it this lean, suited man with the ridiculously large sprig of a plant hanging from his lapel? Paradoxically, they each seem to be transgressing the expected stereotypes by having apparently exchanged clothes, somehow, overnight. In fact, the lean, long-bearded man is John Muir, who at this stage of his life was regarded as a wilderness sage and was already the founding father of the American conservation movement, having become the first president of the Sierra Club in 1892.

What this photograph symbolizes is the end of the frontier and its rediscovery as an essentially inner experience in national parks. In 1901 Muir had developed the concept in his book *Our National Parks*, the key notion of which was to preserve distinctive American landscapes for the "re-creation," as Muir called it, of all future generations of Americans. A second paradox of this photograph is that while the far domes of Tuolumne Meadows in the distance were protected nationally within Yosemite National Park by the statute of 1892, the state of California still held jurisdiction over the valley itself, leasing it out for pig farms and orchards. This meeting with

President Theodore Roosevelt had been requested by Muir in the hope of curtailing California's mismanagement of the valley. Actually, two years after this photograph was taken, California receded the valley to the nation.

Late in the afternoon the two men descended to the valley, politely avoided the bizarre entertainments California politicians thought appropriate here, and camped out under the natural spectacle of the orange evening walls of El Capitan. They were like two backpackers playing truant, which actually they were. For the third paradox of this photograph is that what appears to be an escapist tourist pose in front of Yosemite Falls is both that and more. Not for the first time Muir had used a camping trip as a mode of conservation work. From this kind of pastoral "escapism," Muir knew that insights might come that could effect change at both a personal and a political level. Muir and the president were here enacting a pattern of short-term renewal, by seeking to reconnect their inner nature with external nature—a pattern that has become the model for human survival in Western urbanized societies. The boundaries between the city and the country, between work and leisure, between "weekenders" and wilderness inhabitants, and between inner nature and external nature were being broken down in 1903 both within Muir's personal lifestyle and the culture in which he was active. Muir's writing is important to us now precisely to the extent that it reveals the possibilities to be gained from transgressing the boundaries of forms of knowledge and experience that we have erected between culture and nature.

Why John Muir? Yosemite 1903 and Scotland 2003

A CENTURY AFTER that day in 1903 we are still struggling to know what Muir's statement that "going to the mountains is going home" might mean for our species. Surely mountains, compared with the valleys or the coasts, are the last places we should think of as our home. And what exactly did Muir mean by saying that for "thousands of tired, nerve-shaken, over-civilised people . . . mountain parks and reservations are useful not only as fountains of timber and irrigating rivers, but as fountains of life" (Muir 1901; *W-D* 459; see bibliography for abbreviations)? Should we, in our own time, really be consuming energy resources by "going to" anywhere? Shouldn't we instead be finding an experience like that of "the mountains"—those "fountains of life"—in our own backyards?

Policy makers, conservationists, and individuals are still trying to resolve

the implications of Muir's ideas at both a personal and global level, needing to think beyond the boundaries of our planetary system as well as inside the boundaries of forms of knowledge and discourses that have evolved in our culture. Muir's intensely vivid and always exploratory writing has had a profound influence because it stood as a challenging example. Here was a visionary naturalist, landscape interpreter, mountaineer, learner and teacher, lobbyist, and writer who had integrated his caring curiosity into a lifestyle that was at home in wilderness, in wild nature. For us, over a hundred years later, Muir represents the possibility of accommodated man and woman, at home in the universe and actively participating in its continued well-being.

Yet in Scotland in 2003, even conservationists who have chosen John Muir as an iconic figure for their attempts to preserve wild land in the country of Muir's birth have some reservations about Muir's most famous idea, the concept of the national park. Is it possible that there may be times and places where national parks are inappropriate? The debate currently taking place in Scotland demonstrates the dangers of boundaries and separations and the need for clear thinking in our own use of Muir's ideas. Americans may be puzzled to find that the John Muir Trust has been opposed to national parks in Scotland for reasons that become clear when one considers the nature of the Highlands and the political issues associated with the management of an intricate privately owned landscape of mountains and moorland. Although the context in which Muir developed his notion of national parks in California was very different, ownership had also been an issue in the formation of the first national park in Yellowstone.

In 1849, when John Muir was eleven years old, his father announced to him that he was to leave Dunbar, where he had roamed on the seashore and the fields, "for we're gan to America the morn" (Muir 1913; *W-D* 42). At least, that was how the seventy-year-old Muir dictated it to the secretary of the American railroad magnate E. H. Harriman, who realized that this was the only way he was going to get any kind of autobiography out of Muir—the short book that did not progress farther than *The Story of My Boyhood and Youth* (1913). Twelve years earlier Muir had published what he considered to be a much more important book, *Our National Parks* (1901). This is the book that opens with the famous words first published in 1898 (Muir 1898, 15): "The tendency nowadays to wander in wildernesses is delightful to see" (Muir 1901; *W-D* 459). In this book Muir set out the principles for the notion of a series of "nation's parks," which would preserve some nationally important landscapes and ecosystems for the "re-creation" of future

generations. Yosemite National Park, which Muir was instrumental in creating in 1892, was not the first to be so designated, although it was the first to be preserved for the essential reasons of conservation and recreation. In 1872 Yellowstone had been named a national park, but this was in order to prevent commercial exploitation by the owner of Old Faithful, the geyser attracting the early tourists to the wonders of the West. Thus issues of ownership and the commercial exploitation of landscape were at the heart of the reasons for the creation of the world's first national parks, a concept originating from a Scot transplanted to America.

In 2002 Scotland gained its first national park designation in the Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park, and this has been followed in 2003 by the Cairngorms National Park. Were he alive today, John Muir might have been perplexed at the lateness with which his notion of national parks has been taken up in the land of his birth. In fact, this delayed acceptance highlights the confused and complex issues of the private ownership of Scotland's wild land. For example, recently the Cullin mountain range on the island of Skye was placed on the market for one million pounds, while Ben Nevis, Scotland's highest mountain, was part of a high-profile purchase by the John Muir Trust, a Scottish conservation organization with over ten thousand members and supporters, which buys and manages wild estates in the name of John Muir. The John Muir Trust, in the context of contemporary Scotland, opposed the designation of national parks within an arbitrary boundary of land in the Highlands because of the implications for wild land outside those designated national parks: wild lands in the remainder of the Highlands would not have the benefit of controls that protect the parks. While Americans struggle to find a way to turn the clock back and ban cars from Yosemite Valley, the Scottish authorities are seeking to make a national park of the Cairngorms massif, for which they have recently approved the building of a funicular railway to the restaurant, surprisingly located on its wild and unique summit plateau.

In 2003, on the eve of the Cairngorms National Park designation, the boundary was hastily redrawn to exclude 25 percent of land that Scottish Natural Heritage had thought essential to the park's integrity. Although most of the land excluded is in the ownership of the Atholl Estate, which supported its being in the national park, more economic development is now possible next to the park boundary without the protection of a buffer zone. The director of the Ramblers' Association in Scotland pointed out that the land to be excluded from park control was owned by "powerful land-managing interests" who had also previously "been very active behind the

scenes in persuading the Executive to abandon much of the agreed consensus that had emerged from the public consultation process" (*Wild Land News* 2002–3). The issues of access and management of mountains and moorland in privately owned Scotland have a long history of debate since John Muir left Scotland in 1849. The patterns of land ownership have barely changed since that time and the decision of the John Muir Trust in 1987 to become landowners and to attempt to influence by example is one that Muir would surely have applauded. Muir's anxiety about boundaries and separations, his desire to take a holistic view that reconnects what we know and how we know, are relevant both to the challenges facing the management of wild land in Scotland today and to the broader challenges facing our scholarship, teaching, and creativity at a time of crisis in our relationship with our home planet.

But Muir's challenge to our current environmental crisis and its source in the separations and divisions we make in different aspects of our experience, our thinking, and our work, should be regarded as more iconic than heroic. The vision achieved by his life and writings may be flawed in some of its parts, or local in some of its appropriateness, but it offers an opportunity for reflection that may be liberating for the way we conceive of our present complex experiences of inner and outer nature. So what precisely was Muir's vision and how might we mediate its meaning for us today?

John Muir: Proto-ecologist

Dunbar in the 1840s was a small market town and fishing community. It provided the young John Muir with opportunities to develop a sense of adventure and wonder in the natural world between the seashore and the inland meadows. He learned to climb on the walls of the fifteenth-century castle that sits above the harbor. Looking back in 1903 he might have recognized in his shared adventure with the president, evading the hotel-bound politicians, an echo of his childhood "scootchers," the daring games Muir played with his brother that required the outwitting of parental discovery. When, at the age of eleven, Muir was transplanted with his family to create a farm in the woods of Wisconsin and expected to work from dawn to dusk by a tyrannical Calvinist father, he had to outwit the restraints of his father's Campbellite sect in order both to explore the open unfenced landscape and to continue his self-education. The farming community of immigrant Scots among whom the Muirs had settled lent young Muir books about Scottish

explorers, and he read these in the early hours before the family awoke. Thus Muir continued a largely Scottish education in America. Indeed, it is often forgotten that Muir, who spoke with a Scottish accent all his life, always regarded himself as a Scotsman, carried the works of Robert Burns on his journeys, and made his closest male friends within the Bay area community of expatriate Scots.

When Muir returned to Dunbar in 1893 he found that local people had been following his writings and that he was regarded as another multitalented Scotsman who had "gone overseas" and was making his contribution to the world. In fact, it was Muir's imaginative and practical skills as an inventor, honed by rising at one o'clock on winter mornings to work in the cellar, that led to his entering the University of Wisconsin for two and a half years' study of botany and geology. It was when Muir decided to go to Canada, dodging the draft for the Civil War, which was not his war, that he learned to survive alone while botanizing through forests and swamps. But Muir had to earn a living, and he found that his practical skills were in demand as a machine designer and tuner. When he temporarily lost the sight of one eye in an accident in an Indianapolis carriage-wheel factory, he resolved that, upon recovery, he would devote his life to the study of "the inventions of God" (*LL* 87).

When Muir returned to the United States he began making plans to emulate the Scottish explorers of his earlier reading and travel to South America. First he would walk to the Gulf of Mexico by the "wildest, leafiest, least trodden way" (Muir 1916; *W-D* 119). The writing in his leather-bound journal during this journey of self-discovery established an interplay between naturalist's observations and philosophical reflection that re-examined common assumptions. This was to become an exciting feature of Muir's writing, often challenging his reading of the work of others, from Clarence King to John Ruskin. Equally important was the discovery of a style that could celebrate an integrated vision of the natural world and the place of the human species within it. Posthumously published as *A Thousand Mile Walk to the Gulf*, Muir's journal reflections on this walk broke new ground in according rights to unpopular species and in developing a holistic vision of the environment. In 1867 Muir's journal entry on snakes and alligators in the swamps of Florida is radical for making, not just, as Roderick Nash says, "the first association of rights with what a later generation would call *environment*" (Nash 1989, 39), but for the stylistic mode in which Muir would later expand his holistic vision: "The antipathies existing in the Lord's great animal family must be wisely planned, like balanced repulsion and attrac-

tion in the mineral kingdom. How narrow we selfish, conceited creatures are in our sympathies! How blind to the rights of the rest of all creation! . . . although alligators, snakes, etc., naturally repel us, they are not mysterious evils. They dwell happily in these flowery wilds, are part of God's family, unfallen, undepraved, cared for" (Muir 1916; *W-D* 148). Scots often refer to a snake by its biblical epithet, their disgust expressed by a forceful roll of the *r* in "Serrrpent!" Here Muir is radically attempting to undo what culture has done to biology, acting as a biologically evolved innate safety mechanism as Edward O. Wilson explains in his chapter on "The Serpent" in *Biophilia* (1984, 83–101). For Muir, the biologist, to say in 1867 that a snake is "unfallen" is almost to challenge the very notion of the Fall that culture has created. In Muir's conception that "all creation" has equal "rights" and that there is a fundamental "balance" in the carnivorous dynamics of "repulsion and attraction" in nature, he is working out for himself a notion that, just one year earlier in Germany, had been defined as "Oekologie" by Ernst Haeckel (1834–1919) (see Bramwell 1989, 39). At the very moment that the term *ecology* was being invented, Muir was discovering for himself a way of viewing creation that was itself ecological, seeing it as a dynamic, balanced, "culturally unmediated" community of animals, plants, and minerals.

Even in the malaria that struck Muir down in Florida, he found a further radical insight into ecology. Complaining about what we would now call the arrogance of anthropocentricity, he wrote: "The universe would be incomplete without man; but it would also be incomplete without the smallest transmicroscopic creature that dwells beyond our conceitful eyes and knowledge" (Muir 1916; *W-D* 161). At this low point in his life, John Muir, the future famous publicist of Yosemite Valley, remembered having seen promotional material for the valley (probably produced by James Hutchings, for whom Muir was to work in the valley) and decided to go there, rather than to South America. His Yosemite journal that was eventually published as *My First Summer in the Sierra* is remarkable for two aspects of style that build on the earlier journal of the walk to the Gulf.

First Muir develops his observations on the interconnected relationships between environments and their communities of flora and fauna to the point where he is able to note, in his seemingly casual way, what might be an early definition of ecology: "When we try to pick out anything by itself, we find it hitched to everything else in the universe" (Muir 1911; *W-D* 248). The folksy idiom of this profound statement, where he adopts the Americanism "hitched," is one of the keys to the success of Muir's ecological writing—low-key. In future scientific papers of such significance that they

challenged contemporary knowledge, in letters to friends that became articles almost by accident, and in his most authoritative books, Muir always wrote in a tone of humility and accessibility. Lacking the word *ecologist*, he wrote in 1889 to Robert Underwood Johnson, who was to orchestrate the publication program and lobbying toward the formation of the first national park in Muir's conception of it, that he classified himself as a "poetico-trampo-geologist-bot-and ornith-natural etc.!" (Muir 1889). Muir's disarmingly naive mode of writing put no pressure on readers. He tells us that he ran out of his cabin crying "A noble earthquake!" just in time to witness the falling of a pinnacle named Eagle Rock and thereby discover that much talus in Yosemite Valley is made not by slow attrition but by seismic activity. After climbing a tree to experience its movement in a storm, Muir wrote: "We all travel the milky way together, trees and men; but it never occurred to me until this storm-day, while swinging in the wind, that trees are travellers, in the ordinary sense" (Muir 1894; *W-D* 401). Muir opened the eyes of the American public to what we would now call an ecological vision with a deft and deliberate tact, offering a distancing effect for the reader, despite the intensity of the writing, by his playing the part of an eccentric Scottish naturalist in his writing.

Second, Muir builds his ecological vision into a stylistic technique, using descriptive language and images that blend and connect seemingly disparate aspects of the wild. Earlier Muir had used analogy to understand the dynamics of animal predation, "like repulsion and attraction in the mineral kingdom." The next leap is to reverse the analogy so that we can see the way in which rocks are eating each other, to take one example. If you start by contemplating streams moving over mountains, you might begin to see how mountains themselves are flowing like streams—"mountains constantly walking" Gary Snyder says the Zen master Dogen expressed it (Snyder 1990, 97). Muir notes in his journal of *My First Summer*: "Contemplating the lace-like fabric of streams outspread over the mountains, we are reminded that everything is flowing—going somewhere, animals and so-called lifeless rocks as well as water" (Muir 1911; *W-D* 277). Thus Muir writes about plants as mountaineers and winter storms as the "springtime of snow-flowers" (*LL* 128). And what better image of interconnected growth patterns could be devised by scientific discourse than that in *The Mountains of California* of the Merced River as an elm tree? In *Travels in Alaska* Muir extends his form of stylistic "contemplation" to achieve a breathtaking image for cosmic ecology: "When we contemplate the whole globe as one great dewdrop, striped and dotted with continents and islands, flying through

space with other stars all singing and shining together as one, the whole universe appears as an infinite storm of beauty" (Muir 1915; *W-D* 724).

"An infinite storm of beauty" characterizes Muir's vision of a universe in flux but in harmony, flowing but in balance. This is possible because behind a style that can produce the image of a "storm of beauty" is the recognition of a creative-destructive ecology. When Muir reflected on the "unfallen" state of snakes and alligators in the journal of the walk to the Gulf, he was working out for himself an understanding of the cycles of predation. "Repulsion and attraction" did not just refer to human attitudes, but to the patterns of "the antipathies existing in the Lord's great animal family" in general. Soon Muir was to translate this perception into an understanding of the creative role of the destructive forces that shape landscapes. In describing glacial landscapes Muir frequently referred to the results of erosion in the forms of moraine and glacial gravel as providing food for the highest trees and plants. In *Travels in Alaska* he wrote: "Out of all the cold darkness and glacial crushing and grinding comes this warm abounding beauty and life to teach us that what we in our faithless ignorance and fear call destruction is creation finer and finer" (Muir 1915; *W-D* 841). The counterbalances of negatives and positives in this sentence would have delighted eighteenth-century English Augustan poets, but actually one needs to be reminded that this is the voice of a leading nineteenth-century Scottish American scientist.

Muir's first intentional publication was about a discovery that was to revolutionize contemporary geological science in California. Muir showed that Yosemite Valley was, in fact, formed by glaciation and not by the single seismic faulting that was the accepted theory of the California State Geological Survey. Its esteemed head, Josiah Whitney, dismissed the empirical evidence of "that shepherd" while his young assistant, Clarence King, replied to "that ambitious amateur" by accusing him of "hopeless floundering." Later Muir became aware that professional scientists were stealing his empirical research and his theories, such was their significance (see chapter 3). Indeed, according to Michael Cohen, Muir was developing an ecological model of the Sierra "at least fifteen years before such models were introduced to scientific theory in the 1890s" (Cohen 1984, 191).

On the other hand, the recently published journals of Muir's last major journey, to South America and Africa, remind us that he sought to be a student of as many ecological communities of the world as he could (Branch 2001). In 1893 he revisited Scotland and toured Europe studying glaciation. In 1903–4 Muir spent a year studying forests from Russia to the Far East, then traveled from India to Egypt, from Cairo to Ceylon, then on to

Australia and New Zealand. He wanted his global vision of his home—"Earth-Planet, Universe," as he had written in his journal of his walk to the Gulf—to have a worldwide knowledge base. Muir's constant impulse as a proto-ecologist was to integrate his knowledge and his thinking, gaining from one part of it new insights into another part of it, until he had some new things to say about the mysteries at the heart of that "infinite storm of beauty"—the dynamics at work in our universe. The body of writing Muir has left us blends culture and nature in such profound ways that one might ask if it should be considered as post-pastoral practice. Answering this question reveals the depth of Muir's ability to reconnect nature and culture.

John Muir: Post-Pastoralist

If Muir's proto-ecological scientific work is one important aspect of his contribution to human culture, others must be the literary qualities of his writings and the conservation purposes to which he put them. Less explicitly philosophical and epigrammatic than Emerson and Thoreau, Muir embedded his vision within the literary qualities of his writing. Michael Cohen has tried to trace the development of Muir's thinking through his written style in *The Pathless Way* (1984), his detailed study of Muir's works. But what is remarkable is not so much the development, but the consistency of Muir's vision: his persistent concern to articulate for his readers not just the dynamics of the natural world but what is to be gained by finding a right relationship for our species within it. Part of the attraction of Muir's writing is that running through every aspect of it is a sense of a man personally at home in the natural environment and being invigorated by it in so many ways. Muir's only reason for publishing was to bring others into such a relationship.

Very early in his publishing career, part of Muir's intention was to attract readers into the wild in order to engender the desire to preserve it for future generations, so they too could find renewal at the "fountains of life" of wild landscapes. One year after the American frontier was noted to be defunct by the Official Census (1900), Muir published *Our National Parks*. The American spirit, defined by the notion of the frontier as Frederick Jackson Turner had famously argued in 1894, would need to take on a new shape. Muir knew that the class of lives that most Americans led in the great American cities was based on an exploitation of natural resources

that would ultimately prove to be self-destructive. He knew that our species would need landscape resources to remind them that they are inhabitants of the natural environment and custodians of the earth on which they depend. Muir's writing served a function of reconnection for those American people he characterizes in the opening of *Our National Parks* as "thousands of tired, nerve-shaken, over-civilized people." Rather, Muir thought, those people "who are no longer good for themselves" should be "getting in touch with the nerves of Mother Earth." Although Muir was aware of climate change, which he called "Nature's slow-turning climate key" (Muir 1901; *W-D* 463), he could not have known of our culpability in contributing to it through our unsustainable consumption of energy resources and fossil fuels in particular. Indeed, he could not have known the scale on which our failure to "get in touch with the nerves of Mother Earth," or "keep faith with the source," would render us no longer good for ourselves.

Muir's writing was thus at the interface of culture and nature: culture mediating nature and nature being served, if not "saved," by culture, as he would think of it. He mediated the "wilderness" of his day for the "civilization" of his day, crossing between the country and the city for the mutual benefit of both. He mediated the West for the East, eventually lobbying in the East on behalf of the West. Robert Underwood Johnson, an editor of the New York based publication *Century Magazine*, traveled west to recruit Muir as a writer and, after the inevitable camping trip to Yosemite Valley, ended up becoming the eastern arm of Muir's and his own joint strategy for establishing Yosemite National Park. Indeed, most of Muir's writing was first published in journals that were subscribed to by an urban audience. He himself enacted the movement characterized by pastoral literature in order to produce his publications, returning from his rural retreat to offer a critique that might change the "court" in Washington: Muir retreated from Yosemite to the homes of friends in Oakland or San Francisco in order to turn his journals and letters into articles. Thus John Muir, the American image of "accommodated man," was conducting an ancient and classic movement in literal and literary terms, using the experience of the rural to challenge what is taken for granted by an urban readership. This is the movement that we recognize as the ancient tool of our culture that we call the pastoral. This dates from the *Idylls* of Theocritus from the third century B.C. in which Theocritus wrote about the rural Sicily of his youth for the Greek court at Alexandria. From this early example of pastoral writing we have derived the word *idyllic*, which characterizes the literary construct of an idealized Arcadian representation of nature for an urban audience.

Certainly, at times, Muir's writing can be accused of the idealization associated with what Leo Marx calls "sentimental pastoral" literature (Marx 1964, 5). Muir's description of getting caught in an avalanche, for example, would lead the reader to believe that this is a most desirable experience by which to discover how snow can move, rather than a lucky escape from death. But Muir's most ecstatic writing usually derives from scientific inquiry and could not be simply called idealization. His tendency toward anthropomorphism can be irritating for the modern reader, but Muir is making a stylistic attempt to convey his awareness of the life in all things, including the apparently inanimate rocks and mountains that he knew were actually "flowing." This awareness is actually the basis of his scientific and conservationist thinking, which is of a different order from the kind of imaginative literary writing that Leo Marx characterizes as "complex pastoral" (25). Muir's writing does not deliver moral insights into the human condition upon return from the forest of Arden, or "the enchanted isle," as Shakespeare's pastoral dramas do for Marx in his examples of complex pastoral. Muir's focus is on the relationship between people and the forest—not just on what the forest, as a spiritual and material resource, can give the people, but on the people's responsibility to the forest. When Muir describes the forests of America as "God's garden," what might begin in idealization actually develops into an anti-pastoral attack on the complacency of unplanned, rapacious felling of forests by America's timber industry. In the low-precipitation state of California especially, where human culture is so dependent on water conservation, widespread logging was a self-destructive complacency. Muir's scientific observations corrected a pastoral delusion of the apparently inexhaustible American forests: "For every grove cut down a stream is dried up" (Muir 1901; *W-D* 591). In this brief sentence Muir eloquently and elegantly pinpoints the danger for human culture of simple idealized pastoral attitudes. It is appropriate to Muir's vision (and perhaps revealing of its particular forms of integration) to ask whether Muir's writing should be regarded as writing that I call "post-pastoral" (Gifford 1994).

This is literature that escapes the closed circuit of the idealized pastoral and the anti-pastoral corrective that has challenged it in the way that the eighteenth-century anti-pastoral poetry of George Crabbe, for example, responded to the earlier pastorals of Alexander Pope. Post-pastoral literature seeks to heal the separations of culture and nature. It is a development within the broader practice of ecocriticism that addresses our environmental crisis by seeking possible answers in "texts" of all kinds to the most

urgent question of our times: how can we find a right way to live at home on our planet earth? The post-pastoral is not postmodern in the temporal sense because it would include some of the works of Blake, Wordsworth, and Coleridge, as well as some of the work of Gary Snyder, Rick Bass, Adrienne Rich, Ted Hughes, Gillian Clarke, and Debjani Chatterjee, as I have argued elsewhere (Gifford 1995a). It is not postmodern in the theoretical sense either, because post-pastoral literature seeks modes of reconnection while respecting forms of separateness, recovering and interrogating the grand narratives of growth and decay from our provisional and changing knowledge of a river, a virus, a biosphere. My observations during the last decade of inquiry into what a post-pastoral literature might reveal have led me to suggest that post-pastoral writing tends to raise the same six key questions for the reader. These are questions that can be seen to be implicit in texts, although they are not necessarily functioning in order to raise these questions only. But in Muir's case they are more explicit than is often the case in poetry, for example. It now seems to me that new insights might be gained into Muir's work if one asks whether his prose is structured and stylized precisely to invite readers to consider the six crucial questions that are commonly raised by literature that I call post-pastoral (see Gifford 1999, 146–74). Such insights should reveal the distinctiveness of John Muir's larger vision.

It is immediately clear that Muir's writings for journals, and then later his books, are predicated on the first question asked by post-pastoral literature: can awe in the face of natural phenomena, such as landscapes, lead to humility in our species? John Muir's Calvinist upbringing, seemingly distanced as it was from the American rapacious appetite for natural resources, nevertheless shared an anthropocentric attitude toward the creation that Muir would spend his writing life attempting to redress: "The world, we are told, was made especially for man—a presumption not supported by all the facts" (Muir 1916; *W-D* 160). Such hubris on the part of "Lord Man," as Muir satirized the arrogance of the human species, would lead to environmental degradation, which Muir saw beginning in America. One might argue that he had himself contributed to it when, as a boy, he helped his father clear land in the Wisconsin woods. But the awe with which Muir viewed every part of the natural world—floods and storms as much as anything else—was intended in his writings to induce respect, humility, and, ultimately, conservation in his readers. He firmly believed that anyone who visited the great natural "church" of Yosemite Valley would "worship as he never did before" (Badè [Muir's literary executor and first compiler of his writings] 1924; *LL* 113). Later he was keen to attract visitors to the forest reservations

he was instrumental in creating in order to support their preservation: "The world needs the woods and is beginning to come to them" (214). For Muir, humility based on awe was a first requirement to restrain the exploitation of natural resources.

Muir's bold attempt to convince his readers of the need to recognize the creative-destructive cycles of what Ted Hughes called "the elemental power-circuit of the universe" (Hughes 1971, 9) has already been demonstrated. The second question posed by post-pastoral literature asks: what are the implications of recognizing that we are part of that creative-destructive process? Muir's emphasis on the creative role of destructive forces in the animal kingdom and in landscape formation might lead one to expect that he avoided "a full look at the worst," as Thomas Hardy put it (Hardy 1974, 117). But early in his writing Muir made a remarkable attack on the "morbid exultation" that was associated with "death among our own species." "On no subject," wrote Muir in his journal as he camped out in Bonaventure graveyard on his walk to the Gulf, "are our ideas more warped and pitiable than on death." Town children especially, he thought, were deprived of witnessing "the natural beauties of death." "But let children walk with Nature, let them see the beautiful blendings and communions of death and life, their joyous inseparable unity, as taught in woods and meadows, plains and mountains and streams of our blessed star, and they will learn that death is stingless indeed, and as beautiful as life" (Muir 1916; *W-D* 140). So another reason for Muir's preservationist drive was to provide our species with a directly experienced understanding of our own creative-destructive cycles that are linked to those larger cycles of growth and decay in nature.

This position already raises the third question of post-pastoral literature: if the processes of our inner nature echo those in outer nature in the ebbs and flows of growth and decay, how can we learn to understand the inner by being closer to the outer? In *Our National Parks* Muir implores his readers to renew their inner selves by spending time close to nature in the Rocky Mountain reserves: "Wander here a whole summer, if you can. Thousands of God's wild blessings will search you and soak you as if you were a sponge, and the big days will go by uncounted. If you are business-tangled, and so burdened with duty that only weeks can be got out of the heavy-laden year, then go to the Flathead Reserve; for it is easily reached by the Great Northern Railroad. Get off the track at Belton Station, and in a few minutes you will find yourself in the midst of what you are sure to say is the best care-killing scenery on the continent" (Muir 1901; *W-D* 465). Ever

the realist, Muir offers both practical advice as well as inspiration for the "re-creation" of the urban businessman and woman. But simply looking at scenery is only the first natural and necessary step in experiencing awe. Muir knows that the deepest renewal will only come by the application of a discipline of attention exercising the whole mind and imagination: "When you are calm enough for discriminating observation, you will find the king of the larches, one of the best of the Western giants, beautiful, picturesque, and regal in port, easily the grandest of all the larches in the world." Such "discriminating observation" of nature, Muir goes on to argue, can so renew the inner lives of alienated urban "over-civilised" Americans as to actually prolong their lives. With tongue in cheek he offers the urban businessman immortality: "Give a month at least to this precious reserve. The time will not be taken from the sum of your life. Instead of shortening, it will lengthen it and make you truly immortal" (Muir 1901; *W-D* 466).

Of course, for those who did not visit these reserves, Muir's writing was itself an indirect mode of reconnection with the cycles and processes of nature. In mediating American landscapes for readers Muir was serving both nature and culture. He was conscious that his way of reading nature would influence not only the way readers thought of nature but the way they perceived their relationship with it. Indeed, Muir's first literary offering for publication, in 1871, "Yosemite Glaciers," referred to above, began with a telling conceit: "Two years ago, when picking flowers in the mountains back of Yosemite Valley, I found a book." So artfully developed is this literary device in the sentence that follows that readers may well not recognize it as a metaphor at all: "It was blotted and storm-beaten; all of its outer pages were mealy and crumbly, the paper seemed to dissolve like the snow beneath which it had been buried; but many of the inner pages were well preserved, and though all were more or less stained and torn, whole chapters were easily readable" (Badè 1924; *LL* 481). In this article, published in New York but challenging the current geological science of California, Muir is describing nature as culture—"the great open book of Yosemite glaciers." As has been mentioned, Josiah Whitney and, to a lesser extent, Clarence King, who had actually noticed glacial striations in the valley, had not read this book closely enough, not having realized that living glaciers, still present in the Sierra, were the clue to the formation of Yosemite Valley. Muir liked to say that he made his discoveries about glaciation by lying on the rocks for ages as the ice had done, making his scientific activities seem to be acts of nature—the scientist was really an alert animal at home in the mountains, part of the field, a participant-observer. The exercise of Muir's

eyes and mind in the High Sierra were, of course, nature at work, just as his imagination is nature at work when he is writing up his scientific discoveries in such literary terms. Muir's writings represent culture as nature, communicating information about the ecosystem we inhabit together, just as the water ouzel, Muir's favorite bird, did when disturbed by John Muir. Muir's writing answers the fourth question of the post-pastoral: if nature is culture, is culture nature? The fifth question follows from the affirmative answer Muir's writing gives us: how, then, can our distinctively human consciousness, which gives us a conscience, be used as a tool to heal our troubled relationship with our natural home?

In the second of the articles Robert Underwood Johnson planned for Muir to write for *Century Magazine* in 1890 as part of the strategy of lobbying for a national park at Yosemite, Muir concluded: "Axe and plough, hogs and horses, have long been and are still busy in Yosemite's gardens and groves. All that is accessible and destructible is being rapidly destroyed. . . . And by far the greater part of this destruction of the fineness of the wildness is of a kind that can claim no right relationship with that which necessarily follows use" (Badè 1924; *LL* 614). This final sentence of the article accepts that humans will put this environment to some use, but retains a sense of there being a "right relationship" in the concept of "use." The state of California was putting the valley to the uses of ax and plow while supposedly "holding it in trust for the people," as Muir put it. He was arguing, in this article, for the enlargement of protection, and at a national level, "for the use and recreation of the people," because devastation was already well underway by "lumbermen and sheepmen." Two years later Muir formed the Sierra Club, with a wider remit than is usually realized, to "render accessible the mountain regions of the Pacific Coast" (Badè 1924; *LL* 306). And four years after the formation of the Sierra Club, Muir's writing was to wage a war against an exploitation that was nationwide.

In 1896 Muir was invited by Charles Sargent, chairman of the newly formed Forestry Commission, to accompany the commission on a tour of America's forests that were rapidly being felled. Muir contributed to the eventual creation of thirteen forest reservations across the continent. But there was strong opposition from lumber and mining interests. In an essay titled "The American Forests" for *Atlantic Monthly* in 1897, Muir's prose reached new rhetorical heights on behalf of the nation's forests: "The outcries we hear against forest reservations come mostly from thieves who are wealthy and steal timber by wholesale. . . . Any fool can destroy trees. They cannot run away. . . . Since Christ's time—and long before that—God has

cared for these trees . . . but he cannot save them from fools—only Uncle Sam can do that" (Muir 1901; *W-D* 604–5). Muir's faith in the American public's ability, ultimately, to find a "right relationship" with the natural environment of America, and enforce it by statute, is an endorsement of the collective conscience of the species: "The people will not always be deceived by selfish opposition, whether from lumber and mining corporations or from sheepmen and prospectors, however cunningly brought forward underneath fables of gold" (Muir 1901; *W-D* 603).

There is much that might be deconstructed in this rhetoric of competing fables, but what is particularly striking is Muir's notion of "the people" in this essay and his faith in their choosing to limit rapacious free enterprise to bring these forest environments under a "policy of administration for the public good." The assumption that the public good is consistent with what is good for the environment begs the sixth post-pastoral question, one that has been illuminated by the explorations of ecofeminism and the environmental justice movement: how should we address the issue that the exploitation of our planet emerges from the same mind-set as our exploitation of each other?

It is currently not uncommon for ecofeminists, such as Rebecca Solnit (1994), to make the case that Muir might be vulnerable to criticism on the issues of environmental justice (see Adamson et al. 2002) and gender. In chapter 7 I address Solnit's arguments directly. Here I will point out that, in his time, Muir could not have been an ecofeminist, although he was supportive of women and their environmental interests as much as was possible in his culture, as his correspondence shows (see Gisel 2001). Of course, the Sierra Club, which Muir founded in 1892, was inclusive of women from the beginning, and Muir himself, noting the increase in mountaineers he was meeting in the Sierras, commented that "many of these young mountaineers were girls, in parties of ten or fifteen . . . —a fine, hopeful sign of the times" (Muir 1896, 280). Before environmental justice issues were so named, Richard F. Fleck made a rigorous study of Muir's writings about Native Americans that has not been superseded (Fleck 1985). He charts Muir's initial revulsion at his interaction with degraded and demoralized Winnebagoes in Wisconsin and Diggers in the Sierra, his growing respect for his Digger companion in *My First Summer in the Sierra*, his appreciation in Alaska of an integration in their environment, with the dignity, self-sufficiency, and adaptiveness of the indigenous people, his demand for government aid for the starving communities he found during the cruise of the Corwin, and the celebration he made of "the merry, loving, and caring Chukchis" in the Arctic, whom

he contrasted with the white "temple-destroyers" he returned to deal with in the Hetch Hetchy campaign. Fleck argues that "the Indians of California and Alaska not only confirmed Muir's belief in the need for a harmonious relationship with nature but also inspired him to an even greater awareness of the intricacies of this relationship" (28).

What has been neglected in studies of Muir's work and distorted in representations of Muir as ecocentric wilderness sage is the democratic impulse that underpinned his concern for conservation and the formation of the Sierra Club. Of course, the development of Muir's writing charts a movement in its focus from the first aspect of the post-pastoral to the sixth—from awestruck, "Lord Man"–hating wilderness recluse to tourist-embracing democratic conservation strategist. In Muir's late writing, wilderness and civilization are not alternatives, just as culture and nature are not separate entities. A good culture—a properly civilized nation—is aware that, as a member of a complex ecosystem, our species must use its culture to look after the other species' cultures and communities on which it depends. There is a remarkable paragraph toward the end of "The American Forests" in which Muir seems to be remembering his own family's clearing a farm in the wilds of Wisconsin. It begins: "The United States government has always been proud of the welcome it has extended to good men of every nation, seeking freedom and homes and bread. Let them be welcomed still as nature welcomes them, to the woods as well as to the prairies and plains." In late nineteenth-century America, Muir holds the view that "still there is room" for sustainable living in the woods by those who can find a way of living that is "as natural as birds picking berries from wild bushes and taking moss and leaves for nests." He argues, "Mere destroyers, however, tree-killers, wool and mutton men, spreading death and confusion in the fairest groves and gardens ever planted—let the government hasten to cast them out and make an end of them" (Muir 1901; *W-D* 604). Those who exploit forests can also exploit people. That touchstone American word *freedom* might act as a reminder that the same nation that was conquering and "winning" the land of the West had actually been sustaining an emergent "civilization" by the use of slavery.

Perhaps Muir is valuable to America as an iconic figure because he represents a veering of American culture back toward finding that "right relationship" with what, after all, defines America as distinctive—the landscapes of the nation, the environment that is its crucial resource and its home. In using culture on behalf of nature within a democratic framework, Muir both redeemed and defined America to itself.

CHAPTER THREE

Muir's Multiple Discourses

"The book you speak of is not commenced yet, but I must go into winter quarters at once and go to work" (Badè 1924; *LL* 219). Muir wrote this letter from Yosemite on 2 November 1875, during the first winter snowfall, which suggests that he was already late to be able to retreat to the Bay area and write a book. It was to be almost twenty more years before his first book was published. He was still at the early stage of his career as a writer. He wrote in this letter that his article "Living Glaciers of California" was just about to be published in *Harper's Monthly*. It was only four years since his first article, also about these living glaciers, shattered the professional establishment view that active glaciers did not exist there and that glaciation could not have been responsible for the formation of Yosemite Valley since it was the result of a single cataclysm. But what is most significant is Muir's next sentence, explaining why he needed to withdraw from Yosemite in order to write: "While in the field I can only observe—take in, but give nothing out." Muir felt a distinction between the life he lived in the valley and the pressure put on him by his Oakland and San Francisco friends Jeanne Carr and John Swett, the latter of whom "orders me home to booking," he wrote to Carr (218). Actually he spent the winter and spring of 1875–76 at Swett's house in San Francisco working his journals and letters into articles, rather than a book, for which his friends would have to wait twenty years. It was not until he was fifty-five years old that Muir published his first book, *The Mountains of California* (1894), which the members of the newly formed Sierra Club were eagerly anticipating as the bible of the club. In 1872 Muir had written from Yosemite, "Book-making frightens me because it demands so much artificialness and retrograding. . . . These mountain fires that glow in one's blood are free to all, but I cannot find the chemistry that may press them unimpaired onto booksellers' bricks" (198). But by 1902 Muir had realized that books were what would make the impact that he desired on the culture. He wrote a letter listing six books that he says "I am now at work on" (343), only two and a half of which would be completed by the time of his death in 1914 (*The Yosemite*, *Travels in Alaska*, and half of "my autobiography which

for ten years or more all sorts of people have been begging me to write" in *My Boyhood and Youth*).

This tension between being out in the field and being closeted in town writing about it reveals several significant aspects of Muir's mode of working that are crucially informative and affirmative of modern dilemmas for writers who, while wishing to engage with environmental issues, want to be out there, doing it. "The book you speak of" can, in a sense, only be written by *not* being in Swett's house on Taylor Street, San Francisco, sitting at a desk upstairs, but on the glassy, herringboned slabs of Yosemite, walking upward and outward toward new discoveries that must have, in Muir's mind, delayed any book project further. Muir had already spent nine months at the McChesney house in Oakland during 1874 working on the seven articles for the *Overland Monthly* that became known as *Studies in the Sierra* (1874–75; *LL* 389–478). Muir clearly had an awareness that the discourse of books was not beyond him—not simply a sense that he had books in him, but that his experience and the growing readership of his essays demanded books—and this must have been present for those twenty years yet to come of exploring and reading and writing his essays. It may be that the essay form was actually not only *the* form for him but also for his subject. Again and again we discover that the essay is a crucial form for personal engagement with the world and for case studies of that experience. In chapter 11 I argue that the essay is perhaps the best form for exploring the intense and relatively brief engagements with nature undertaken by the rock climber. This is certainly true for Muir's mountaineering essays, which are discussed in chapter 10. The essay mediates an observed, deeply felt inner/outer experience—and withdraws. Its key features are a reflective narrative and its use of metaphor, not just in the density of its style, but in the very form itself as somehow representative. It is the prose form of the epiphany—the small, intense experience of pastoral withdrawal by which most urban creatures read of the natural world, in poetry or prose. Muir knew this and he knew that he could satisfy the urban appetite for this writing, and that books, while somehow necessary, could also wait.

Chapter 5 shows how Muir's method of reading and making notes in the endpapers of his books served his future writing projects. Each notation of "Yo" in the notes he made at the back of his copy of volume IV of *Modern Painters* is a reminder that Ruskin makes a point that will be useful to Muir for his future writing about Yosemite. This chapter seeks to draw attention to Muir's multiple and integrated modes of writing within the essay form. The letter of 2 November 1875 seems to emphasize separations. In the field,

Muir can only write assimilating journal notes and letters, thinking that he is not confronting big projects that will require much "giving out," as he puts it. He withdraws to the urban supports of friends like John Swett and J. B. McChesney to turn this material into essays and eventually the books compiled from his journals, letters, and essays. So actually Muir not only mediated the wilderness for his urban readership, but himself commuted between Yosemite Valley and the Bay area in order to do so. This belies the popular image of Muir (which he himself encouraged later in life) as the Yosemite recluse, escaping culture and social life, that is perpetuated as recently as 1994 by Rebecca Solnit in her otherwise brilliant book *Savage Dreams*. In a sense Muir was actually continuing the four-thousand-year-old nomadic use of Yosemite to which Solnit seeks to draw attention in her book. So Muir not only brought the American people closer to their distinctive landscapes, eventually using the influence of his urban audience to legislate on behalf of that wilderness, but he himself, during the famous years of his explorations in the Sierra Nevada in the 1870s, became an annual commuter between the city and the country for the very purpose of mediating that cultural gap. In other words, Muir was not only writing but also living in the ancient classical mode of the pastoral referred to in chapter 2—returning insights gained from retreat in contact with nature for the renewal of life in the court or the city.

This is, of course, the modern way in which the national parks Muir helped create would be used (cultural geographers would say "consumed") by annual and weekend vocational commuters. What has been lost is an integrated way of understanding this relationship and the fundamental need it represents. This is the post-pastoral quality that Muir's writings have to offer us today in our very specialized and separated modes of knowledge. The nineteenth century, Gillian Beer notes, produced "a culture that set so much store by relations between the different branches of learning and on application to active life" (Beer 1983, 47). Our modes of representing this experience of necessary "re-creation" in national parks to each other have become separated as they have become specialized. The poetry is no longer in the science, just as the scientific narratives have become more arcane. Lamenting this state of affairs in her book *Science and Poetry*, Mary Midgley writes: "There is no necessary battle between our different parts, there is merely a great difficulty in seeing ourselves as a whole" (Midgley 2001, 55). What is significant about Muir's modes of discourse is the richness of their integration of ways of knowing, and of communicating that knowledge. Just as Muir could not keep separate his writing in journal mode from letter

mode from article mode from, finally, book mode, since any of the former might appear in the latter, so too Muir could not keep separate his spirituality from his science, or his poetics from his glaciology.

This is partly accounted for by Muir's determination to remain an apparent amateur in all fields and to avoid as much as possible a professional, narrowly scientific discourse. Quite why Muir did not become a professional scientist can be explained by the realization that he wanted to maintain in his life and writings all of the six strands of post-pastoral inquiry. That Muir could have become an academic scientist is beyond doubt. He had already made significant contributions to geology, glaciology, and botany when, in 1889, Muir characterized himself to Robert Underwood Johnson as the "self-styled poetico-trampo-geologist-bot-and ornith-natural etc.!" But that "self-styled" is the point. The persona Muir has adopted here is also notable for integrating modes of writing as well as modes of knowledge: Muir is a self-declared "poetico-geologist." I have argued in the previous chapter that Muir's "trampo" persona, like the jokey amateurism of his self-styling here, enabled Muir to be accessible to a popular audience as an unthreatening, engagingly eccentric writer. Johnson was the editor of the Eastern *Century Magazine* and had come to recruit Muir as a popular and influential contributor in what would become their joint campaign to preserve Yosemite as a national park for the nation's future education and recreation. In fact, Muir was able to achieve more in America's conservation politics precisely because he declined to adopt the discourse of the professional scientist.

This is not to assume that he was unaware of how his discoveries were being used by the professionals who were impatient for conventional scientific papers from him. Muir suspected that his refusal of scientific discourse initially left him vulnerable. The first and unintentional publication of Muir's writing was the result of a theft by a professional botanist. The theft was from a letter to his friend Jeanne Carr about his discovery of the rare orchid *Calypso borealis* in Canada. It was simply stolen from her house by a visiting former teacher of Muir at the University of Wisconsin, James Butler. Actually it had been Professor Butler who had recommended to his students the keeping of a "commonplace book" in emulation of Emerson and instigated Muir's journal habit (Wolfe 1945, 78). The recent publication of Carr's explanatory letter to Muir (15 March 1867) makes clear her anger: "Mr Butler was in here one day and carried off your letter, and without my knowledge or consent copied and published what you said of the *Calypso* in a letter of his own to the *Boston Recorder* [22 December 1866]. There is no law against such an indelicate and outrageous abuse of the privileges of friend-

ship. Except the law of one's own mind. . . . Mrs Merrill [who would read this letter to Muir because he was temporarily blinded] is a woman of sense and may be trusted with my anger" (Gisel 2001, 43). Muir's name had not even been mentioned by "Prof. J. D. Butler," who began his introduction to Muir's work, in a piece titled "Botanical Enthusiasm," with the words: "A young Wisconsin gatherer of simples [*sic*] seems not a whit behind Thoreau as a scrutinizer and votary of nature" (40).

There are several telling ironies in this incident that have a bearing on Muir's integrated modes of writing. In Muir's first publication he is compared to Thoreau, yet he remains anonymous as the credit falls on the University of Wisconsin's Professor Butler, who has taken the trouble to publish in a Boston newspaper. It is likely that the Thoreauvian comparison derives from the "votary" quality of Muir's writing. At the time of writing to Jeanne Carr about *Calypso* Muir had not yet decided to dedicate himself to the service of nature. But when he received Carr's letter informing him of this publication Muir was temporarily blinded by the eye injury that was to be the turning point in his, indeed, becoming a "votary of nature." In the stolen letter to Carr, Muir described how he had wept for joy at being in the presence of "superior beings" as he sat beside *Calypso borealis*. His scientific discovery is described as an experience of religious awe. He concludes with what was to become a characteristic call for the humbling of the human species as a result of direct engagement with nature. How could humans curse "thorns and thistles?" he wrote. "The curse must be within ourselves. Give me this keen relish for simple pleasures, and he that will may monopolise the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, the pride of the life,—yea, all pomps and marvels of the world" (Gisel 2001, 41). The irony of all this seems to have been lost on the hubris of Professor Butler.

The final irony is that, to spare Butler's reputation, Muir later in life generously fabricated an explanation for this inadvertent publication in an autobiographical fragment posthumously published in *The Life and Letters of John Muir*: "I wrote to the Professor, telling him about this meeting with Calypso and he sent the letter to an Eastern newspaper with some comments of his own. These, as far as I know, were the first of my words to appear in print" (Badè 1924; *LL* 71). Why would Muir write "as far as I know"? Looking back in this undated autobiographical note, he would surely have been keenly aware, like any author, of when his first words appeared in print. It must be that he was aware that his work could have been appropriated by unscrupulous professionals without his knowledge even earlier than 1866. So, in the process of honorably drawing a veil over the dishonorable act of

his former teacher, Muir reveals a continuing anxiety about whether Butler, or others, might have offered more of his letters for publication. Muir may well have been writing this fragment after another such case late in his life. In March 1905 a long letter to Jeanne Carr was published without permission in the *Craftsman* by its associate editor, George Wharton James, who had acquired several boxes of letters following the appointment of an executor for the ailing Jeanne Carr in 1897 (Gisel 2001, 11). Muir's expression of uncertainty in the phrase "as far as I know" may have also been complicated by the fact that his publishing career had really begun by his asking Jeanne Carr to offer his letters to journal editors. But Muir's anxiety clearly dates back as far as 1872 when he suspected that at least two professional academics were passing his own theories off as their own in the absence of scientific papers from Muir.

"Living Glaciers of California" began life in a letter to Jeanne Carr dated 8 October 1872 in which Muir set out his empirical research results in glaciology, joking, "You will have the first chance to steal" (Badè 1924; *LL* 173). This follows his complaint that a paper for the Boston Society of Natural History from Professor Samuel Kneeland drew from Muir's work "and gave me credit for all of the smaller sayings and doings, and stole the broadest truth to himself." When Muir's literary executor, William Frederic Badè, compiled *The Life and Letters of John Muir*, he tactfully omitted a paragraph from this letter in which Muir also wondered how much credit he was being given in a lecture by the Berkeley geologist Professor Le Conte whom Muir had guided with his students in Yosemite two years before (Gisel 2001, 194). This lecture was to be published and was advertised as "advancing many new and interesting theories" (190). Muir wrote to Carr that he could better express his own thoughts for the public than Le Conte's "second-hand rehash" (Badè 1924; *LL* 189). So Muir's resolve to publish his own work more effectively, using Jeanne Carr as, in effect, his literary agent, derived, at least in part, from a mistrust of professional scientists. In his determined amateurism and refusal to limit himself to the discourse of the professionals, Muir reached a wider audience with greater effect and gained for himself a place not only in scientific history but also in literary history. In the richness of Muir's discourse he reveals himself to be what he admired in Asa Gray, "a great, progressive, unlimited man like Darwin and Huxley and Tyndall" (Badè 1924; *LL* 169). But in a telling note to Jeanne Carr following Gray's visit to Muir in Yosemite in the summer of 1872, Muir wrote: "He is a most cordial lover of purity and truth, but the angular factiness of his pursuits has kept him at too cold a distance from the spirit world" (Gisel 2001, 184). So Muir turned his back on the "angular factiness" of scientific discourse.

What are the ways in which Muir's discourse might be described as "progressive" and "unlimited"? In the spirit of breaking down the conventional academic separations in the search to discover the workings of Muir's multiple and integrated discourses, the literary approach of close reading that might usually be reserved for poetry may provide new insights into his work. Two key features of Muir's writings are his use of narrative and metaphor, the crucial devices of the essay form. It came naturally to Muir to express progressive scientific discoveries using the devices of the literary essay. Even as he prepared to give the facts and figures of the movements of his stakes in the Mount McClure glacier, which proved that the living glaciers of the high Sierra were moving one inch each day, Muir launched into a mystery narrative, vivid with detail, lively in analogy, seductive in alliteration, and powerfully rhythmic: "One of the yellow days of last October, when I was among the mountains of the Merced group, following the footprints of the ancient glaciers that once flowed grandly from their ample fountains, reading what I could of their history as written in moraines and canyons and lakes and carved rocks, I came upon a small stream that was carrying mud I had not before seen" (Badè 1924; *LL* 173). Ending this sentence with a slightly formal inversion enables Muir to produce the rhyme that points toward the mystery: "stream"/"seen."

In his personal narratives Muir frequently exclaims aloud, as he does here: "Before I had time to reason I said, 'Glacier Mud!—mountain meal!' " The dramatic effect of this on the page has actually been enhanced by Badè's addition of the quotation marks and exclamation points (compare Gisel 2001, 195). It is worth remembering that Muir developed a reputation for oral dramatic storytelling that must have been symbiotic with his written narrative sense. Ronald Limbaugh (1996) has brilliantly shown that Muir integrated not only his reading into his writing but also his oral storytelling in the case of the story of *Stickeen*. Michael Cohen notes that when Muir's friends came to publish their memoirs of him in the *Sierra Club Bulletin*, many of them gave the impression that Muir was "a more effective speaker than writer" (Cohen 1984, 278). (See *LL* 893 for one such memoir of Muir's "wonderful story-telling ability.") So, as the narrative unfolds, mud leads to a terminal moraine, above which is snow, on which are lines of stones clearly moving in curves. Muir says that upon witnessing this he shouted, "A living glacier!" Le Conte had mistrusted Muir's sample of glacier ice that Muir had sent him years before, so Muir "determined to collect proofs of the common measured arithmetical kind," which in this letter/article/paper he goes on to provide. Of course, what Muir's measurements revealed was a narrative much more important than that of personal discovery, solving a

mystery, or correcting the skeptical professionals of his day. It is the fundamental narrative demonstrated by Darwin, whose *Origin of the Species* was published in 1859, that creation is still ongoing. Indeed, it was while Muir's stakes were moving in the Mount McClure glacier in September 1871 that he was visited in Yosemite by Professor J. D. Runkle, president of MIT, who promised to send Muir a copy of Darwin's book (Badè 1924; *LL* 152).

It is the dynamic interplay of elemental forces in the natural world that is Muir's central narrative. The reason his writing is often so dramatic is because he seeks to place himself in the way of these forces not only for the purpose of empirical observation but also to be at home in them like any other species. Muir's scientific data is always a personal narrative because he wants to demonstrate that it is possible for our species to find a place in that ongoing creation. The scientist is himself embedded in the processes of nature he is observing. Muir's personal example leads his readership to be aware of choices crucial to its influence on evolution. If, for example, logging reduced the number of tree species in America, the future evolution of American forests was limited in its development. Conservation became, for Muir, not just nostalgic preservation, but an intervention in potential futures. In specific cases this narrative would determine whether the human species could survive in America. When Muir noted that the logging of watersheds, for example, was having a disastrous effect on water conservation in California, his was a post-pastoral concern for the future of the human species in that dry land as much as it was for the evolution of American forests. "For every grove cut down a stream is dried up. Therefore, all California is crying, 'Save the trees of the fountains' " (Muir 1901; *W-D* 591).

In writing about Darwin's evolutionary narrative, Gillian Beer writes, "Evolutionary theory brings together two imaginative elements implicit in much nineteenth-century thinking and creativity. One was the fascination with growth. . . . The other was the concept of transformation" (Beer 1983, 97). When Beer writes that the reason Wordsworth and Coleridge mattered to Darwin was that their "emphasis on growth and process rather than on conclusion and confirmation," one recognizes Muir's central narrative drive. For Muir that unfinished process of American nature—rather than American "landscapes"—had implications for the American people; he believed it called for a conservation debate deeper than the usual nineteenth-century American concept of "wise use of resources," which was used to justify continued depletion of forests, for example. This required a popular mode of writing that could draw on all the resources of rhetoric. As a trained scientist who had carried with him on his walk to the Gulf the Bible, Mil-

ton, and Burns, Muir had the literary skills as well as the discipline base to combine the discourses of authoritative scientist, popular poetic nature writer, and conservationist preacher with, admittedly, varying degrees of success.

Unlike Darwin, Muir delighted in his rhetorical resources. "Despite the metaphoric density of his writing," Beer writes, "Darwin seems never to have raised into consciousness its imaginative . . . implications. . . . He saw some of the dangers of 'authorisation' " (Beer 1983, 92). Muir reveled in "authorisation," playfully and brilliantly mixing his metaphors to startling effects. I argued in chapter 2 that these stylistic techniques usually expressed his proto-ecological vision of the complexity of interrelationships he was observing. It might help, Muir thought, to understand the globe as a dewdrop, the Merced River as an elm tree, the glacier's destructive grinding as an artist creating both rock and floral beauty. But looking further than this use of analogy alone, I want to consider here how Muir achieved the mixture of discourses that were so important to his style and popular appeal and effectiveness as a founder of the American conservation movement. He can be at his most poetic precisely when he is at his most empirical. And although he can be biblically blasting from his conservation pulpit like the most severe Scottish Puritan, his conservation discourse is often more celebratory than censorious, more gently persuasive than indignant.

In January 1873 Muir finished one of his three readings of Ruskin, and in the winter at the other end of that year he began his series of essays that did for the Sierra what Ruskin had done for the Alps. *Studies in the Sierra* is probably Muir's most sustained scientific work, liberally illustrated with explanatory sketches following Ruskin's model in *Modern Painters*. Not collected together in a single volume until published by the Sierra Club in 1950, the *Studies* consisted of seven essays for the *Overland Monthly* published in 1874–75. Only two years earlier the great Louis Agassiz, the world's leading authority on glaciation, said, "Muir is studying to greater purpose and with greater results than anyone else has done" (Badè 1924; *LL* 172). That Muir thought of these essays as representing a more detailed contribution to knowledge of glaciation than hitherto available is suggested by his footnote recommending "the excellent elementary works of Agassiz, Tyndall and Forbes" and in his explanation that this field of study was comparatively new (Muir 1874; *LL* 437).

Michael Cohen has argued that Muir's mature style needed to go beyond the "clumsy and clichéd metaphor of Nature as Book" (Cohen 1984, 111) and that *Studies in the Sierra* demonstrates Muir's struggle to transcend the

limitations of the metaphors of nineteenth-century science. In fact, Muir's developing agenda, as Cohen himself shows in his book *The Pathless Way*, is to find a language that does more for the landscape itself than could be achieved in the language of science. While Cohen found Muir's opening metaphor of his first publication clichéd in "Yosemite Glaciers," to my mind, it is not only stunningly convincing as a sustained metaphor but fundamental to Muir's own journey from religion to science to conservation. This journey, which is the story of the development of his writing and can be seen as the structure of some late essays, is charted by shifts in metaphor. As I suggested in chapter 2, I find it hard not to believe that some readers of the *New York Tribune* in December 1871 might have thought that Muir had literally found a book, so sustained is the detail of the developed opening metaphor, which needs to be seen as an unfolding drama: "Two years ago, when picking flowers in the mountains back of Yosemite Valley, I found a book. It was blotted and storm-beaten; all of its outer pages were mealy and crumbly, the paper seemed to dissolve like the snow beneath which it had been buried; but many of the inner pages were well preserved, and though all were more or less stained and torn, whole chapters were easily readable" (Muir 1874; *LL* 481). What a delicious red herring is the "picking flowers" trick. Even by the time the reader gets to "stained and torn" the detail is convincing, serving more the device than the actual evidence. And what is to be read in these still-intact chapters? the reader will want to know. The answer is to be no less breathtaking than his metaphorical device: the confounding of Josiah Whitney and the California Geological Survey.

Writing two years later, Muir began not with a metaphor, but with a hope to surprise his readers with the information that the rugged mountains of the Sierra were actually developed by the power of "tender snowflowers, noiselessly falling through unnumbered seasons, the offspring of the sun and the sea" (Muir 1874; *LL* 395). Muir's readers might not have recognized as a metaphor Muir's presentation of this information as a surprising "tool" chosen by "the Master Builder." But this characterization of God the creator is significant on two counts. First is Muir's eventual dropping of references to God as his writing grew more pantheistic. By the time he was writing his final book, *Travels in Alaska*, he preferred to refer to the creation rather than the creator as Muir's notion of God became progressively more absorbed into the divinity of nature itself. Even within the essays of the *Studies* themselves Muir moved from referring to the "architect" to simply "Nature." At least by 1872 he had rejected the God of the churches, which "lisp limpingly, painfully, of man's capabilities, possibilities, and fussy developing

nostrums of duties, but if the human flock, together with their Rev.'s and double L-D shepherds, would go wild themselves, they would discover without Euclid that the solid contents of a human soul is the whole world" (Gisel 2001, 174). (Badè, tactfully protective as ever as Muir's literary executor, untruthfully inserts "[Part of the letter missing.]" for this portion of Muir's letter to Jeanne Carr of April 1872 [Badè 1924; *LL* 171].)

This is not to imply any reduction of Muir's sense of spirituality, of course. On the contrary, the trajectory of his narrative is to encourage his readers to share his sense of religious awe and respect for nature in order to want to participate in its conservation. "Cathedrals" and "mansions," his favorite metaphors for rock formations, litter the science of the *Studies* and are part of Muir's rhetoric toward this end. Reading the "open books" of the Sierra would offer a journey that would develop both science and spirituality for Muir and his readers. Take, for example, this opening of a paragraph within the essay on "Post-glacial Denudation": "Few of the toilers of the plain know the magnificent exhilaration of the boom and rush and outbounding energy of great snow avalanches" (Muir 1874; *LL* 449). Muir knew where his readers were coming from and offered them exhilaration with his information. Such awe was intended to be infectious and would later provide the foundation for appeals for a commitment to conservation in Muir's readers.

One of the techniques Muir frequently used to generate the awe of looking at something afresh was analogy used for poetic effects. Thus we have in the discourse of the *Studies* "ice-ploughs," "glacial cultivation," "ice-wombs, now mostly barren," "pages of rocks embellished with gardens," a "canyon-tree" of ice whose "fruit and foliage" are "meadow and lake," together with a "five-petalled glacier." In her study of Victorian scientific prose, Gillian Beer notes the use of poetic effects: "Poetry offered particular formal resources to think with. . . . The poet sets up multiple relations between ideas in a style closer to the form of theorems than of prose" (Beer 1996, 210). It is clear that Muir was thinking with his metaphors, as when he wrote that while the tree analogy for a river served some aspects well, in other respects they "more nearly resemble certain gigantic *algae* with naked stalks" (Muir 1874; *LL* 451–52). The essay on the "Formation of Soils" concludes with Muir's all-encompassing proto-ecological vision that all his poetic devices try to serve: "Nor in all these involved operations may we detect the faintest note of disorder; every soil-atom seems to yield enthusiastic obedience to law—boulders and mud-grains moving to music as harmoniously as the far-whirling planets" (Muir 1874; *LL* 468). The scope of this,

as well as its biblical construction and rhythms, conveys a subtle spiritual dimension that is inherent rather than explicit. Muir had intended to include in the *Studies* a poem referring to the five glaciers that had combined to create Yosemite Valley. Jeanne Carr persuaded him to omit "Nature Loves the Number Five," the five stanzas of which were the result of a more than scientific inquiry: "I can never keep my pen perfectly sober when it gets into the bounce and hurrah of cascades" (Gisel 2001, 216).

But later in life, faced with the urgent need for conservation campaigning, based on his then extensive scientific knowledge, Muir was also to be roused to the ranting discourse of the preacher. "Dam Hetch Hetchy! As well as dam for water-tanks the people's cathedrals and churches, for no holier temple has ever been consecrated by the heart of man" (Muir 1912; *W-D* 716). Muir could work his rhetoric up to end a book with a bang: "God has cared for these trees, saved them from drought, disease, avalanches and a thousand straining, levelling tempests and floods; but he cannot save them from fools—only Uncle Sam can do that" (Muir 1901; *W-D* 605). The final arguments of *The Yosemite* and *Our National Parks* respectively are not Muir's strongest, despite their forceful form of discourse. Both arguments appear to appeal to the religious norms of his readers, but both are flawed by their own internal logic. If man-made temples are not as holy as Hetch Hetchy they might actually provide better water tanks. And no post-Darwinian proto-ecologist can believe that "God" has "saved" America's forests. In fact, the rather more measured discourse that has preceded these resounding final rants is more convincing.

Just before the final flourish that ends *The Yosemite*, Muir took each of the popular arguments for flooding Hetch Hetchy and corrected false information and impressions. Muir argued that this valley is "one of the greatest of all our natural resources for the uplifting joy and peace and health of the people . . . where Nature may heal and cheer and give strength to body and soul alike" (Muir 1912; *W-D* 714). The argument for the healing power of direct contact with wild nature for urban humans appealed to both utility and spirituality. In his later writing Muir's democratic appeal on behalf of "the people" was the basis for his conservation strategy. As mentioned in chapter 2, Muir, himself an immigrant lacking an "American" accent, made a moving argument at the end of *Our National Parks* about America's welcoming those to the woods who would live wisely in them, but recognizing that regulation for sustainable living must ultimately be made by the federal government to control corporate lumber interests.

These discourses are some way away from the apparently sentimental

personifications Muir could adopt, as when, returning from days spent on the glaciers, "bird and plant friends" welcomed him back among them (Muir 1918; *W-D* 900; see chapter 10 below). It is worth noting Gillian Beer's observation that Darwin's anthropomorphisms were "based on the assumed congruity of man with all other forms of life" (Beer 1983, 51). Richard F. Fleck has suggested that in referring to plants as people, Muir was adopting practices he had learned from the Digger Indians of California, including "certain mystical principles of Shamanism with which he would become familiar in his excursions to Alaska ten years later" (Fleck 1985, 32). The modern English nature writer Richard Mabey defends Muir's referring to wild creatures as "friends" in terms of needing contact "with other ways of being against which to measure ourselves" (Mabey 2005, 105). However excruciating such discourse may be for postmodern readers, it is fair to recognize that Muir's eccentric whimsical persona produced these effects partly out of the same mode of discourse that allowed for "snowflowers" and "petalled glaciers." Images that reminded readers of the seamless nature of the processes of growth and decay, of the sensitivity of everything to its context, and of the way we understand what is going on in one part of nature by analogy with another were key features of Muir's rhetorical strategy. To read in the *Studies* that "the huge granite valley was lithe as a serpent, and winced tenderly to the touch of every tributary" (Muir 1874; *LL* 431) may now cause us to wince ourselves. But here was a work of science that sought to convey a vision of more than just "congruity" while straining at the limits of the resources of human discourses.

Culture is at its most challenged when it seeks to offer a complex representation of nature that combines normally separated modes of knowledge: the scientific and the aesthetic, the disinterested and the celebratory, the supposedly factual and the frankly emotional. But our culture is how we live our nature. Mixed and multiple discourses are our natural voice. Muir situated himself so as to avoid being restricted to any one mode, to search for a voice that could include the richness that might be possible somewhere between the discourses of Agassiz and Burns, Darwin and Milton. Explorations of natural processes, landscape, imagination, and language undertaken by Muir the scientist, poet, preacher, and conservationist always have to reach the general reader. Muir speaks from the margins in his adopted persona to mainstream culture as a strategy for maximum influence, in his democratic way of thinking, on citizens, voters, and legislators. Although his modes of discourse were multiple, his audience seems to have remained fixed in his mind. This is why letters could so easily become

articles and then become chapters of books. Historians of the American conservation movement prefer to see a "domestication" of Muir's metaphors, from "wilderness temple" to "national park" (Philippon 2004, 110). But I am suggesting that a range of discourse was increasingly available to Muir in the service of what admittedly was a changing agenda in the course of his life from personal celebration to empirical science to a national conservation strategy.

By rejecting the "angular factiness" of scientific discourse and embracing the metaphorical imagination within a strong narrative structure, Muir exemplifies what the philosopher Emily Brady calls "the integrated aesthetic" in her book *Aesthetics of the Natural Environment* (2003, 120–90). Muir's intention is to adopt a discourse that is "disinterested," in that it ultimately serves a conservation purpose on behalf of the landscape and forests about which he writes, although at times he is capable of "aesthetic hedonism" (260) when he is welcomed back by his "bird and plant friends." Muir's emphasis on the sensual, on the value of direct experience, on his use of imagination, and on the need for a spiritual appreciation of scientific knowledge places his discourse in the realm of the aesthetic. Emily Brady's notion of "the integrated aesthetic" allows us to see that Muir's discourse attempts to bring the reader into an appreciation of the natural environment that is as subtle and multifaceted as it can be. This approach enables us to see that when Muir writes "Let children walk with Nature, let them see the beautiful blendings and communions of death and life" (Muir 1916; *W-D* 140) he is advocating an aesthetic experience at its deepest level. What is essentially a noncognitive direct experience should lead to an apprehension that goes beyond the cognitive perception of a creative-destructive nature in which we are embedded. Walking and "seeing" appear simple, but the "blendings and communions" are more than ecological processes. They are offered by Muir as accommodations to the death process that are natural and unavoidable, and that should be embraced from an early age as a normal part of nature.

Brady would characterize this kind of "seeing" as "imagining well"—"developing imaginative skill in order to relate better to others, make moral choices, decide how to live one's life, be creative, make discoveries and so on" (Brady 2003, 161). Brady offers constraints to "help locate the distinction between relevant and irrelevant imaginings" (158) and distinguishes between "exploratory, projective, ampliative and revelatory imagination" (154), each of which are obviously deployed by Muir. But these insights into the importance and functions of imagination in the aesthetic appreciation of

natural environments help us understand why Muir rejected the "angular factiness" of scientific discourse. Summarizing her position, Brady argued "that scientific knowledge can impede appreciation of *aesthetic* qualities, and that it does not provide more appropriate knowledge than other alternatives, such as religious or mythical narratives. I questioned the implicit claim in cognitive theories that science provides the truest foundation for appreciating nature on its own terms, and showed why science too relies on a cultural framework" (183).

Muir's earliest published journal, *A Thousand Mile Walk to the Gulf*, is probably his earliest sustained prose attempt to find a discourse adequate to his sense of the dimensions of the world to which he was so alert. This journal is a young man's purging of many of the assumptions with which he has grown up. It is both a humbling and an uplifting experience: "The substance of the winds is too thin for human eyes, their written language is too difficult for human minds, and their spoken language mostly too faint for the ears" (Muir 1916; *W-D* 171). But for Muir the demand for a rich use of multiple discourses that reconnect not only our forms of knowledge but our modes of expression, the central theme of this book, is produced by the attempt to confront the complexity of the world in which we have to be at home or die. Muir's early frustration at the limits of human discourse arose out of a deep sense of the complexity of relations in the natural world he wanted to mediate. In that early journal Muir wrote: "There is not a fragment in nature, for every relative fragment of one thing is a full harmonious unit in itself. All together form the one great palimpsest of the world" (Muir 1916; *W-D* 168). Only a literature such as Muir developed, that drew from all the multiple modes of discourse available, could hope to see into and serve that palimpsest.

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CHAPTER FOUR

Teaching Environmentalism through Writing

THIS BOOK has been arguing for the cross-fertilization of scholarship, criticism, teaching, and creativity toward the study and, indeed, the creation of a post-pastoral literature. It follows that teachers of creative writing who also have an interest in ecocriticism might explore some possibilities and challenges that post-pastoral ecocriticism might offer to pedagogy. In particular it would be interesting to follow the example of John Muir offered in chapter 3 to reconnect diverse modes of discourse in responding to a specific environment and some of the environmental tensions within it. In this chapter I describe and reflect on my weekends as writer in residence for Wigan schools at Hinning House, Dunnerdale, Cumbria, where I have developed a program and techniques that engage with the mountain environment through an integration of a variety of forms of writing. These techniques lead to a debate about environmental issues located in that particular valley. All teachers know that ideas that work in one context with certain students might be adapted to work in another context with other students. So although the case study offered here describes work with fourteen-year-old students, it will be clear that there are wide implications for an environmentally oriented teaching of creative writing at other levels and in other contexts.

This is a project that I have been evolving on several weekends a year for the last ten years at Wigan Local Education Authority's Hinning House Outdoor Centre. The Duddon Valley, where the house is located, is the most secluded valley in the Southwest Lake District. Wordsworth wrote a sonnet sequence about following the River Duddon to the sea at the west, and Ruskin's Brantwood home is in the next valley. After traveling north for two hours from industrial Lancashire, pupils must transfer from their coach to smaller minibuses for the journey on narrow roads to what is almost the last house in the upper dry glacial lake bed. Hinning House Outdoor Centre is one of two owned by Wigan Local Education Authority and is used as an outdoor activities center, so a writing weekend is unusual here. Hinning House accommodates and caters for twenty-four pupils and their staff.

What I describe here is the latest evolution of a program I have adapted in different ways for elementary and high school students. The objectives of this project are to raise awareness of environmental issues through activities that include oral work and persuasive writing, as well as imaginative narrative and poetry writing. (See Cooper 1998 for the placing of my writing exercises in the outdoor education program provided by Wigan's outdoor centers.)

On Friday evening, after the students have been given their personal equipment and the rules of the house, I introduce myself as a writer and my interest in the valley. The dialogue includes reference to the windy road they've traveled, to the wall map locating us in the Lake District (with its lakes like the spokes of a wheel), to the notion of the national park, and to the special quiet remoteness and wildlife of this valley. I read my poem "Dunnerdale 1979" (Gifford 2003, 18). But I also mention the tradition of weekend visits to the Lake District from Lancashire industrial towns like Wigan. Then we go out for an evening walk. If it is a dark winter evening the pupils do not carry flashlights, although they are in the pockets of staff. It is rare for a vehicle to pass us while we are walking the lanes of this valley at night. We make a series of stops for taking notes in pairs. (If it is a time of year when it is dark, instead of writing notes, pupils are asked to respond to a series of questions after talking in pairs. The questions take them through much the same process as the written note taking.) In my instructions for the notes, I am developing a formula that produces heightened language from observation, with a focus on the senses. My guidance goes like this:

> List three words that sum up the atmosphere in this place at this moment (e.g., "peaceful," "scary," "threatening"). Circle one of these words (e.g., "peaceful"). One inch in from the left-hand margin list three actual things that represent, or contribute to, the word you've circled (e.g., "sky," "hills," "sheep"). In front of each of these three words write a descriptive word. Look carefully and make it precise to this place now (e.g., "calm sky"). Each of these three things is doing something. Write what it is doing using an active verb (e.g., "calm sky waits"). Add a word ending in *-ly* that describes how it is doing it (e.g., "calm sky waits contentedly"). Add to each line the word "like" or "as though" and finish the phrase (e.g., "calm sky waits contentedly like a blanket on the bed"). You now have three lines based on this formula: adjective, noun, verb, adverb, simile. Let's hear some. Now using this formula write a line about the shape of something else that contributes to the atmosphere here.

At a second stop along the lane I will ask for a line, using the formula, about the texture of something, then a line about a sound, then about an

aroma. At the third stop pupils will be asked to vary the formula to make a metaphor rather than a simile. This will be about the way something moves (e.g., "The slow river is a silver thread winding through the fields"). The next metaphor will be about the stillness of something. Finally they will be asked for a line about something they have not noticed so far.

At an ice-smoothed and striated rock, I point out that it has been formed by fire (it is volcanic rock) and later shaped by ice (see the striations). It represents the glaciated volcano from which the present landscape of the Lake District was formed, with its lakes like the spokes of a wheel as we saw on the map. Then I mention the way more recent water and weather have shaped the features of this valley that we have been describing: fells and fields, river and ravines. Human uses of the landscape in front of us are observed and listed. I like to draw attention to how at ease we have become in this apparently wild, now dark, or darkening, place. It is important at this early stage of the (as yet, undeclared) project to be aware that our species has been at home in this landscape for a long time. I point out that "country people have been walking these lanes and footpaths without streetlights or flashlights for centuries." (Later, Kerry Daniel, aged fourteen, wrote this remarkable Thoreauvian sentence: "We had been the animals of the night, fear an insignificant factor in our lives.")

So we travel and pause for listening, looking, and taking notes after the lane and the rock, on into the dark wood, across the open pasture, back up the lane by the river, then across the fields (with a stop to call up the owls) toward the house lights. Indoors, pupils work on the first draft of a poem titled "Night Walk in Dunnerdale," using a model from previous Wigan pupils in the twelve-page anthology I've prepared for everyone. I show them how to find a form through redrafting, breaking the phrases and lines differently, and spacing them on the page differently to see how form changes possible meanings, experimenting toward a final draft. To do this I take an example from a volunteer and demonstrate alternative spacings on the blackboard:

1. The calm sky waits contentedly
   Like a blanket on the bed.
2. The calm sky waits
      contentedly
         like a blanket on the bed.
3. The calm sky waits
   Contented as a blanket
   Over the bed of the valley.

Pupils are often absorbed in this until surprisingly late at night. When the pupils have gone to bed, staff members begin typing a selection of the best of these into the computer for the Sunday publication that will contain one work from everyone.

On Saturday I set up the weekend's project with a conversation. Discussion starts with the summer hose ban in Wigan, which limits water use for gardens and cleaning cars, and its reasons, which leads to mention of concepts they've learned at school, such as the ozone layer and global warming. "Many of the lakes of the Lake District," I point out, "are actually reservoirs supplying Manchester and Wigan with drinking water. Soon there will inevitably be a proposal to flood the upper Duddon Valley, where we are sitting now. If we look outside the window we can see how suitable it would be, with a dam across the ravine of Wallabarrow Gorge, where we walked last night." We brainstorm the advantages for and against, for locals and visitors, that will come from the widening of the road and the consequent possible tourist developments. To children, water sports are very appealing, and better access, for everyone, in buses, to this wonderful place seems like a good idea.

I now use Friday's pairs to form four groups and allocate to two groups the task of developing arguments *for* the proposal to flood the valley, and to the other two the task of finding arguments *against* it. In these groups, with this given focus, they now list the arguments we've just brainstormed and try to add more. Their task on Sunday morning will be to make a group presentation to convince their audience of their case using any writing produced over the weekend, plus quotations from reference books in the house library and from the anthology I've put together for them. After the presentation they will have a free vote on an individual voting slip. This ensures everyone knows that, whether they happen to be sympathetic to the side of the debate they have been assigned to represent or not, they will have a personal vote on the issue at the end of the weekend. This produces running informal discussions between pupils on what they personally think about the arguments they are collecting for the group presentations. Recognizing the difference between arguments that can be made and the personal evaluation of these arguments produces a sophisticated handling of environmental ethics that does not ignore personal sympathies and emotions but avoids foregrounding them as the first response expected. The personal vote is therefore made as a result of the whole weekend's process of debate and reflection.

Now I read from *The Iron Woman* (Hughes 1993, 10–14). I suggest that in

this project they are really listening to and speaking for either Water Spirit, who knows the benefits of flooding, or Mountain Spirit, who is threatened by flooding. I invite them to write the story of "The Coming of the Mountain Spirit or Water Spirit," like the Hughes story, which must end with the plea "Help me!" Here is one example, like all those used here, from a weekend with fourteen-year-old pupils from Byrchall High School, Wigan:

The Coming of the Mountain Spirit

Laura apprehensively walked through the dark eerie forest, the bracken and leaves crunching beneath her feet and the deep evergreens towering above her. The tranquil atmosphere and gentle flow of the river soothed her. She felt she was alone.

Suddenly she heard a faint noise. Did she imagine it? Perhaps it's the whisper of the wind through the trees, she thought. She shrugged it off and continued through the forest.

A familiar smell enveloped the forest, the smell of nature, the fresh damp smell of the country. It comforted her, made her feel safe and secure.

She walked aimlessly through the forest in a dream world of her own until suddenly a bright piercing light attracted her attention in the distance. Very slowly the blurred image of an old man began to emerge in an array of colours. She slowly began to distinguish his features. The piercing blue light was his eyes, as bright as the sky on a hot summer's day. The wrinkles on his face were creased like the rocks sporadically arranged across the valley.

He began to speak, his words slow but steady.

"Help us," he whimpered. "Our time is almost up."

"I don't understand," Laura cried in a panic-stricken voice.

"I am the spirit of the mountain."

Laura began to realise the pain of this man and her fear was lost. A man who had stood alone for millions of years watching over the valley, protecting it from danger, the mountain that shaped the valley—and now this magnificent being was asking for her help.

Sarah MacRae

Of course, further chapters of this narrative can be developed back at school. But now we leave for a woodland walk. After crossing a stream to enter the springtime bluebell woods, I draw attention to the birds, fungi, flowers, dry oxbow lake, the path itself (and lack of litter), anthills, and the ants' trails. This takes us to a bankside at the entrance to Wallabarrow

Gorge, where we sit. I invite note taking on the journey of two people, A and B (any relationship), that was the same as ours this very morning. A was showing B the things we had just seen. I distribute the anthology from my rucksack and read Ruskin's three principles of political economy (Ruskin 1903, 27:91–92) before asking pupils to take notes on the elements of air, water, and earth in this place. We cross the river by the stepping stones, and I read from the anthology Wordsworth's Duddon Valley sonnet IX written here in 1818 (Dawson 1988, 30).

So we proceed through Wallabarrow Farm, where the unexpected lies around every corner: a lama called Wesley, a Vietnamese potbellied pig, a golden pheasant, the old farmer himself, exotic doves, and a barn-owl hole in the architecture for the resident rat catcher. On the rising path beyond the farm, we pause in woods halfway up to Wallabarrow Crag for an update in the note taking for this journey. Here I ask writers to inject into the fictional relationship an anxiety about something that A has been feeling lately about B.

We scramble up below the crag to a belvedere, where we stop to write an ecological amulet. I quote John Muir: "When we try to pick out anything by itself, we find it hitched to everything else in the universe" (Muir 1911; *W-D* 248). "Look," I say, "everything is joined to everything else, sometimes in ways that are invisible. In front of us there are invisible chains that make the most unlikely connections. What is the chain that connects these rocks with those clouds? Make a list naming the links of a chain that connects any three things (e.g., clouds, rocks, ferns). Now make a list that links any eight things, but make the chain return to the first thing (e.g., clouds, rain, wind, rocks, earth, roots, ferns, clouds). Put in the verbs of what one thing is doing to the next thing (e.g., clouds spew rain, rain rides wind, etc.). Add adjectives to the things. Write an amulet based on my poem 'Bat Charm' in the anthology (Gifford 1991, 37). Look at the amulets written by previous Wigan pupils in the anthology. Some begin with a common linking word, but the basic idea is that the last word of each line will provide the first word of the next line."

Amulet

Below the grass dripping moisture
Below the dripping moisture crawling creatures
Below the crawling creatures hungry hearts
Below the hungry hearts living love

Below the living love the grass
Below the grass dripping moisture

Anya Smith

At the summit, after another steep scramble, we perch in the wind, above everything. We write notes on how this view and the achievement bring a clearing of perception about the anxiety in the relationship. Character A makes a resolve to do something upon return. Summit experiences can do this. In many European cultures, summits are the location for churches. These notes become a poem in which images from this view are used to stand for processes at work inside the character. The trick is to suggest emotion, through the way the character sees the elements of the view, rather than stating the precise anxiety and its actual resolution. "Try to end with a gesture," I suggest, "or an action that suggests a resolve to do something."

Summit

The barbed wire
Trapping him.
The silence
Buzzing in his ears.
The dizzy mountains
Spinning around his head.
The silent rock
Standing
Wide open to the world.
The disturbance of a machine
Had no effect on his hazy mind.
He wanted to be alone
To untangle.
His mind pulled with the powering clouds above,
He looked at his friend
Then at the mountains closing in on him.
As he walked away
They seemed to move back with him.

Beth Morell

After lunch the walk takes us past ancient piles of field-cleared stones, Grassguards Farm's chickens and dogs, a ford, a pied flycatcher stream, steep beech woods, more stepping stones, and bluebell slopes up to the

road. So we return to Hinning House for some (supervised) free time in the fields and stream.

After dinner, groups prepare questions to ask "four local visitors, who will be arriving this evening." They are the vicar (against flooding), a local teenager (for), the national park warden (against), and a farmer turned developer (for). These visitors are actually role-played by teachers and me, who circulate around the groups. This produces some of the most passionate debate and most engaged work of the weekend. This is unrecorded oral work, although the recording of key statements by an assigned note taker allows for later quotations from these interviews to be used in the presentations. In these interviews and the animated discussion that always follows each one, land-use ethics are debated with great intensity as the pupils eagerly take on their roles against, or with, the role-played "visitor." Here the ethical issues are not distanced or abstract, but are about a valley they know and a threat or opportunity they understand and have already considered. Sometimes a "visitor" will actually be persuaded by a group's arguments and will modify or reverse his or her stance on the issue. Always the group presentations include some quotations from what the "visitors" have said, or have been maneuvered into saying, in order to make a point in the debate with the authority associated with a statement from an adult. Some of the land-use approaches adopted by the "visitors" may be oversimplified caricatures, but they will be new to these pupils and produce shocked outrage that such ethical positions could be held. Noise levels do get quite high!

To calm everyone down I give a slide-illustrated introduction to John Muir, showing his home in Scotland, the site of his cabin in Yosemite, the Sierra landscape he interpreted, and his house in Martinez. I emphasize his proto-ecological vision, his being at home in the natural world, and his role in inventing the idea of national parks, such as the one we are in now. I end with slides of places bought by the John Muir Trust in Scotland and talk about the urban need for wild places to visit, bringing us back to the Wigan-Dunnerdale link.

After dark, if the weather is clear, we go outside and lie on the grass in silence, stargazing. For urban pupils this may be the first time that they have seen the universe they inhabit, or have felt the earth beneath them, making the quality of bodily connection that David Abram suggests we have mostly lost, to our cost. Abram calls this kind of activity "the recuperation of the incarnate, sensorial dimension of experience [that] brings with it a recuperation of the living landscape in which we are corporeally embedded" (Abram 1996, 65). Stargazing can produce quite revelatory poetry on return to the house:

Stargazer

My eyes are dazzled.
The brightness jeers at the dark.
In a glance
The dead stars increase tenfold.
So comforting,
Yet not,
They are a smothering blanket of safety.
Reaching out,
Stars are an imaginary cluster in my clumsy hands.
My eyes turn fuzzy.
How many needless hands reach?
How many oblivious eyes see?
Unknowingly,
The whole universe is looking
At my small shooting star,
Alone in thought
Yet connected with the world.

Claire Witherington

On Sunday morning we go for a last walk and I encourage talking in pairs about the arguments to be presented. Then back at the house pupils prepare their presentations. I write on the board, "Possible elements in your presentation: introduction; night-walk poem; amulet; 'The coming of the . . .'; summit poem; journey prose; interviews; quotations from Ruskin, Wordsworth, Muir, or others; a poster; a slogan; a summary of key arguments; conclusion: why you should vote for or against." Groups choose how they want to structure their presentations, whose work to include to represent the elements they have selected for their structure, and who will read which parts. We try to make time for a rehearsal before the four groups actually make their presentations for their assigned side of the debate. These are often, by now, impassioned and impressively structured arguments. One fourteen-year-old wrote a concluding speech that was an amusing exercise in rhetoric:

> If you want trees, go to the rainforests! If you want mountains, go to the Alps! If you want meadows, then what are farmers' fields for? If you want rare birds, go to the zoo! If you like sheep, then buy a woolly jumper! And if you want them all together, then that's just greedy!

How does one tree vary from another? How does one plant vary from the next? How does one bird vary from the rest? It has two wings, a beak, it flies, it sings.

Don't care about the creatures; think of all those flies biting your arms, biting your legs. Think of the midges clouding your air. Think of the brambles gashing your legs. Think of the ants crawling over your boots, your clothes, your face. Think about yourself. You have the best for yourself, the best for your friends!

Take this opportunity for yourself. You've written poems about Dunnerdale. Don't think ecologically, think economically. Think money, big bucks. Your poems will be worth a fortune! The Duddon Valley to be lost to the water will be a kilometre at the most. Who cares! There are miles of Lake District! Think of the needs of the towns, the cities, the people. Vote in favour of the reservoir. Think of your children, your children's children. Who cares about the Lake District if we're all going to die of dehydration!

You can't call yourselves nature lovers! We all live in the cities, pumping CFCs into the atmosphere. We all use spray deodorants. We all have fridges! And why? Because we want the best for ourselves. Don't fool yourselves into thinking that you care for the countryside, because if you did, then why would you pollute it?

> Who cares about the trees, the plants, the plains?
> Who cares about nature down country lanes?
> Be patriotic, think clearly, think straight.
> Think of the ski slope. Won't it be great!
> It's hot in the summer, your hose pipes locked away
> For a water ban is in progress, to onlookers' dismay.
> How, you may ask, can we avoid such a state?
> By voting for us in the reservoir debate!

(Duncan MacRae, who wrote this, has since graduated in biological sciences at the University of Oxford.)

The audience's attention during the presentations is focused by the fact that a personal vote is to be cast following the four presentations. The creative work is introduced as evidence for what is either to be lost or to be made accessible by the widening of the road to greater numbers. Poems and narratives originally written without an ethical position are now marshaled into the arguments about land use at the climax of the weekend's project. Such "evidence" of varied kinds is being manipulated for a persuasive purpose. The videos some schools make of these presentations provides inter-

esting material for further teaching about the use of evidence in environmental debates and the evaluation of issue-based arguments.

Now voting slips are offered by a teacher. In a recent vote six nine-year-old pupils were so convinced by their own arguments that they voted "for" and the remainder "against." On another occasion the votes were cast equally on each side.

During the night and Sunday morning the teachers have been preparing the publication containing one piece from everyone, including staff. During lunch this booklet is distributed and we celebrate the publication by asking pupils to "choose one you like by somebody else and read it for us." The quality of the work induces instant admiration of poets who had arrived in this place unaware that they were poets.

In quick order, we clear up the house, load the minibuses, and wave good-bye to a magic weekend that is not dependent on a magician. The techniques and the program I have described could be taught by anyone. This is important. To be a teacher, which is what writers in this situation are, is to offer empowerment through imagination and language that, when it is working, feels like being a magician. But the success of this project should not be dependent on the special powers of a charismatic writer/teacher.

So what environmental values have been taught here? Let me answer this with ten tentative reflections on this project as one form of post-pastoral practice.

1. Objects have become subjects, mediated through language, listened to, seen closely. Patrick D. Murphy has written that "Nonhuman others can be constituted as speaking subjects, rather than constituted merely as objects of our speaking" (Murphy 1995, 14). Through these writing activities special attention has been paid to speaking subjects, through finding the voices of "Mountain Spirit" and "Water Spirit," for example. What began as the objects of descriptive writing have been given voice through this mythical character. "Letting the land speak through us," as Murphy puts it, sounds a sophisticated concept, but children can make the imaginative ecocentric leap with great facility, given a model example of a mode of doing so in the story by Ted Hughes.
2. "At the end of the weekend a lot of people had produced work that they were proud of," wrote fourteen-year-old Laura Davenport in a pupil evaluation I requested from one Byrchall High School group. "Some brilliant poets had been discovered," wrote Joanna Heaton

from the same group. Where does the quality of the writing derive from? I would suggest that the key to high quality work lies in a structured engagement with a place that is felt to be special in the heightened, concentrated language that comes from a residency away from home. These writing exercises are transferable to any landscape, as is the notion of the issue-based environmental writing project as a whole. It helps, of course, to have a sense of the distinctiveness of a landscape and its land-use tensions, but these elements are not hard to find. The heightened language comes from the pupils finding the specialness of place with the right guidance for the initial attention, the note taking, and the final shaping of the work.

3. Where do the weaknesses in the writing derive from? From the pastoral clichés we all bring with us about "beautiful landscapes" and from the temptation to overwrite, to use two adjectives where one startling one would be better. Where the quality of attention is poor, the language that the pupil supposes to be expected by the teacher is substituted for the sharpness of surprise that comes from looking and listening beyond the obvious or the expected.
4. Processes and connections in nature have been emphasized. These are slightly different perceptions and are taught by the amulet and the summit exercise in particular. Form here provides a way of seeing. This, in turn, informs the quality of the ethical debate in the project. Processes and connections in the making of challenging "nature writing" have been learned too, through note taking, drafting, and integrating forms of language from oral work to writing questions, reports, polemic, narrative, and poetry. The integration of all the cultural resources of reading, talking, and writing in the service of the environment and our relationship with it is one of the implicit aims of this project. It is to be hoped that this model of a direction for school teaching should not be lost on the teachers present.
5. Dialectical debate has been taught through arguing the claims of the environmental versus social, local versus national, human versus nonhuman, work versus leisure interests. These are the common tensions raised by the role-played interviews and subsequent discussion. They have not been raised in an abstract way, as they might in a classroom exercise, but in passionate debate about what is more than a case study. It is about the very land on which we are living for the weekend, these lanes we walk, this river we enter, these meadows we cross, this house in which we work and sleep. In a sense the writing of poems

is a sensitizing process that is necessary preparation for the land-use debate toward which the project is aimed. Pupils come away feeling that they have resolved something on behalf of this valley. They often ask before leaving, "Is this valley really threatened with flooding?" The answer is, "If not this one now, then another one, or at the very least the raising of water levels in the existing lake in the next valley." When they next encounter an environmental issue inside or outside the curriculum, it is to be hoped that they might recognize some of the tensions, some of the arguments, and some of the rhetorical strategies with which they have engaged in this project.

6. This project has been an introduction to environmental pressure group politics and the balloting process. The presence of the final personal vote turns the function of the presentations into pressure-group politics rather than academic argument. The details of designed voting slips, their allocation, the voting booth, ballot box, and formal announcement of results provide the experience of the dignity of democracy in action. Pupils might remember what a "spoiled paper" is when they reach voting age and might make use of their vote correctly since they will be familiar with the process. They might even remember having enjoyed political debate. They might think that environmental issues are worth voting about—that debates concern real places.
7. Interdisciplinary sources of information have informed the variety of writing and language forms. Information about history, geomorphology, hydrology, ornithology, botany, economics, land management, literary history, and literary forms has been introduced without the alienating boundaries of naming these disciplines as curriculum subjects. Perhaps what is missing from this project is an engagement with hard scientific evidence. With different sources of knowledge and skills in the teaching staff, more could, perhaps, be offered to the project, although there are limits to what can be absorbed in the outdoor context of much of the work during the weekend.
8. The summit exercise in particular is intended to lead toward an understanding of the inner through its parallel in the outer. Literature, especially perhaps oral poetry, has traditionally used images from nature as icons or symbols of natural processes by which to understand emotional forces or the paradoxes of the inner processes of relationships. The English folksong "The Seeds of Love" would be as good an example as Blake's worm in the rose. That what is now called "the

environment" provides us with reminders of our continuity with it, as much as our current alienation from it, is a literary tool as old as oral literature itself. This is a preoccupation of my own poetry and an "environmental value" I am keen to pass on (see McFadden 1985). The physical continuity experienced by pupils when this is successful is not to be understood as a vague "at-one-ness" but as a recognition of difference at the moment of seeing that outer forces can help us understand our inner forces at a personal level.

9. Rather than encourage a vague notion of the "equality" of our species with the rest of the organic world, this project has observed differences between all living things, recognizing their individual features and qualities. This is essential to learning to live in, rather than on, our environment. Clearly as a species we do not have equality with others in a simplistic sense because we have a sense of responsibility. The importance of respect for difference, a celebration of otherness, and a listening alertness to what is now called "the more-than-human world" are fundamental to the reconnecting spirit of this project.
10. A danger of working in this "beautiful" mountain environment and emphasizing its special qualities might leave the implication that environmentalism is concerned only with places like this and not with the pupils' local environment. Indeed, the contrast is what first strikes them. In a pupil evaluation Jennie Lutas wrote, "In this secret haven I have noticed that grass replaced concrete, people were replaced by sheep, and chaos was replaced by calm" (see Turkle 1999). It is crucial to recognize that this kind of project is not dependent on the mountain environment. From another location, using a youth hostel as a base for a weekend environmental writing project, I have focused the writing and oral assignments around the issue of whether to bypass a linear village of narrow streets by sacrificing a neighboring quiet valley to a new road that would relieve congestion in the village. The final vote by these thirteen-year-olds was sixteen to six against the bypass. But the project could also usefully take place around the pupils' school in Wigan.

Recently I have been able to visit the school of a group that came to Hinning House and extend their thinking and writing about their local environment. With Guilded Hollins Primary School, Wigan, I ran a school-based weekend of environmental creative writing with pupils and their parents using the playing fields around this inner-city school and a local park.

This was an exercise in reconnecting with the processes of nature available within an urban neighborhood and considering the threats to such environments. (There has been a strong temptation in the United Kingdom over the last two decades for urban schools to generate capital by selling off their playing fields in areas of great housing demand.) Here the children, who had already been to Hinning House with me, were able to guide their parents in the writing exercises of shared, family creative writing. A subject for further research would be to find ways in which this Hinning House project could give pupils a sense of having gained transferable skills. In the future, as the energy crisis begins to bite and we all are forced to travel less, we will have to "hunker down" where we live, as the American "deep ecologist" George Sessions put it to me at an ASLE conference (the Association for Studies in Literature and Environment). But it is important now that teachers find the "specialness" that is just around the corner from home, rather than in the mountains.

The program and techniques of creative writing described here should have something to offer all teachers concerned to raise awareness of the environmental issues facing our species. It should not be difficult to translate this issue-based project for creative writing to a college level. Teachers of writing have a model here for a field trip that avoids, if it is thought to be an advantage, too much logistical concern with camping gear or cooking. Teachers with a specialty such as geography, environmental studies, local history, or science have a model here for inviting a writer to work in collaboration to raise awareness of environmental values. Here's the excuse to take students to that "special place," turn on the enthusiasm for it, and do something for its future. Alternatively, here's the excuse to discover the specialness of the locality or campus where you teach and do something for its future by using the curriculum and the teaching skills available to develop both environmental values and communication skills underpinned by John Muir's use of multiple discourses to explore postpastoral questions embedded in an actual environment. Isn't that what our planet needs just now—informed, questioning, empowered, environmentally aware citizens?

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CHAPTER FIVE

Muir's Mode of Reading John Ruskin

Over twenty-five years ago Donald Westling published an important essay on John Muir's distinctively American form of Ruskinian prose. He suggested that "Muir took his premise and method from Ruskin, sharing with the English writer a hope that, even in a technological culture, an implicative description might relate our sense of fact to our sense of value" (Westling 1977, 42). Westling argued that "the genre of Ruskinian descriptive prose developed as one literary attempt to pretend nineteenth-century society back into a sacred unity" (41). However, subsequent Muir scholars do not agree that Muir was a follower of Ruskin's vision or his prose. Michael Cohen, for example, emphasizes Muir's reservations about Ruskin in Muir's letters. Cohen writes, "[W]hen Muir read Ruskin he discovered that 'Mountain Glory' and 'Mountain Gloom' were little more than a restatement of old Christian dualities between heaven and hell" (Cohen 1984, 39). Most Muir scholars take at face value Muir's complaints about Ruskin. His biographer Frederick Turner, for example, writes that "Muir rejected Ruskin's contention that in the mountains man beheld the juxtaposition of God and Satan" (Turner 1985, 222). A closer examination of Muir's mode of reading Ruskin, informed as it is by his concern for himself as a writer, scientist, and conservationist, reveals a more complex process than simple rejection of Ruskin's work. The similarities in style, language, and vision evident from the most cursory of comparisons raise a number of questions. Did Muir actually learn from Ruskin the multiple modes of discourse that enabled him to move between lyrical descriptive prose, scientific inquiry, and angry preaching? Did Ruskin provide a model of post-pastoral concern for quality of environment and quality of life for human beings? One might ask not just what Muir took from Ruskin but how Muir used his reading of Ruskin for his own writing, focusing on a literary process that one ought to expect at the outset to be as subtle and mysterious as other processes of nature.

First, the similarities that Donald Westling found in the prose and vision of the two writers require consideration. In chapter 2 I argue that Muir's

vision was a proto-ecological vision of a post-pastoral accommodated man, which was attractive to Muir's readers because it was also presented as a way of life. "Balance" and "harmony" were Muir's key words, but they are qualified by his post-pastoral vision in that he accepts a creative-destructive dynamic in his allusive prose style and combines a concern for environment with a concern for people. This would suggest that Muir might view Ruskin's notions of "Mountain Gloom" and "Mountain Glory" not as dualities but as complementary aspects of a single process at work in mountains. Chapter 3 shows that Muir's metaphorical imagination demonstrates how the "blendings and communions of death and life" are forces at work in minerals as in animals, in glaciers as in hills. In the book he was working on when he died, *Travels in Alaska*, Muir was explicitly critical of how we often fail to see the long-term nature of this dynamic in glaciers, for example: "Out of all the cold darkness and glacial crushing and grinding comes this warm abounding beauty and life to teach us that what we in our faithless ignorance call destruction is creation finer and finer" (Muir 1915; *W-D* 841).

Compare this with Ruskin on "The Sculpture of Mountains" in *Modern Painters*, volume IV (1856):

> In the hand of the great Architect of the mountains, time and decay are as much the instruments of His purpose as the forces by which He first led forth the hills in leaping flocks—the lightning and the torrent, and the wasting and weariness of innumerable ages all bear their part in the working out of one consistent plan; and the Builder of the temple for ever stands beside His work, appointing the stone that is to fall, and the pillar that is to be abased, and guiding all the seeming wildness of chance and change, into ordained splendours and foreseen harmonies. (Ruskin 1903, 6:180)

The similarities are inescapable in terms of style (generalizations expressed through detail, building to a surprise climax), language ("temple," "splendours," "harmony"), and vision (destruction is creation in nature). One biographer says of Ruskin, "[T]o read what nature had to say about man, to keep open the bridges between the human world and the world of inanimate objects, and between art and sciences: that was Ruskin's life's work" (Kemp 1990, 31). With shifts of emphasis ("to" humans rather than "about," for example), much the same could be said about Muir.

So what exactly could possibly be Muir's reservations about Ruskin? How did Muir's reading of Ruskin produce reservations that gave a distinctiveness to his own post-pastoral vision and were these reservations justified? There are only three direct references to Ruskin in Badè's selection of letters and one in Muir's second published article. The latter is, in

effect, a joke against Ruskin's somber aesthetics. In the article "Yosemite in Winter," which followed Muir's famous "Yosemite Glaciers" piece in the *New York Tribune* quoted in chapter 3, he describes the arguments between the overwintering shepherds in Yosemite in 1871, before adding, "Ruskin, who deals with the relationships between men and mountains, may find some difficult problems here. In striking contrast with these diminutive wranglings are the broad, loving harmonies of our whiskey soirées of which about seven are held weekly" (Muir 1872; *LL* 492).

Muir's most extended reflections on Ruskin are offered in a letter of 10 January 1873 from Yosemite Valley to J. B. McChesney, the principal of Oakland High School. Muir thanks McChesney for giving him these "handsome gardens of Ruskin" through which he has completed "a ramble." They make, Muir writes, "a handsome landscape in spite of his numberless boundaries and human-carved rocks" (Badè 1924; *LL* 186). Muir's integrated concept of knowledge, which is expressed in his multiple modes of discourse, is offended by Ruskin's "boundaries." They are what Blake called in the poem "London" "mind forg'd manacles" and what Muir here calls "human-carved rocks" that get in the way of Muir's notion of unified knowledge. So Muir's first reservation is about Ruskin's use of the nineteenth-century empirical approach to inquiry by categorization, which Muir goes on to characterize with Blakean imagery as the "ropes and chains manufactured in the mills and forges of conventions." What Muir does not recognize here are Ruskin's attempts to go beyond the categories he deploys. One need do no more than return to *Modern Painters*, volume IV, to which Muir refers in all his comments on Ruskin, to find Ruskin writing, "there is a continual mystery caused throughout *all* spaces, caused by the absolute infinity of things. WE NEVER SEE ANYTHING CLEARLY" (Ruskin 1903, 6:75).

Muir's second reservation is about what Frederick Turner calls Ruskin's "tone of arrogant assurance" (Turner 1985, 382), described by Muir in this letter as "the conceit and lofty importance of a factor of a duke's estate" (Badè 1924; *LL* 187). Admittedly this does become increasingly true of Ruskin's writing, but it does not represent Ruskin's starting point as an observer of nature. Earlier in that same volume of *Modern Painters*, Ruskin wrote in italics about the discipline of humility required in order to really see color: *"Pride is at the bottom of all great mistakes"* (Ruskin 1903, 6:66). Muir's intuitively expressed vision would make no imaginative claims for itself, but Ruskin recognized the interactive role of the human imagination in mediating what it saw: "The aim of the great inventive landscape painter must be to give the far higher and deeper truth of mental vision, rather

than that of the physical facts" (6:35). It is perhaps also true, as Muir says of Ruskin, that "[y]ou can never feel there is the slightest union betwixt Nature and him," although one ought to remember the Ruskin whose first view of Mont Blanc inspired such awe that he sensed a diminishment of even his ego. In a recognition of the impossibility of "union" with this particular part of nature he was forced to turn aside, "associating myself fraternally with some ants" (5:184).

To say, as Muir does in this letter, that Ruskin's writing lacks "hints and hopes of indefinite growth" (Badè 1924; *LL* 186) is to misunderstand the imperative of moral choice that pervades Ruskin's engagement with every aspect of environment. Ruskin lacks Muir's buoyant optimism (that was to be defeated in the case of Hetch Hetchy) because he has seen, perhaps better than Muir, "the storm-cloud of the nineteenth century," as he called it. In the 1884 lectures under that title (Ruskin 1903, 34:9–41), Ruskin was both metaphorical and literal in drawing on years of observations of accumulative pollution from the blast furnaces at the coast at Barrow on the clouds blown westward in front of Brantwood, Ruskin's pastoral last home and retreat. For Ruskin, environmental pollution was a product of moral pollution. His passion was no less than Muir's in offering hope against the odds of capitalist exploitation of the earth's resources. The key was making society aware of the choices it was already making. In a May Day 1871 open letter, Ruskin offered the hope of a paradisial environmental vision as an alternative to the current trends:

> your power over the rain and river-waters of the earth is infinite. You can bring rain where you will, by planting wisely and tending carefully—drought where you will, by ravage of woods and neglect of the soil. You might have the rivers of England as pure as the crystal—so full of fish that you might take them out with your hands instead of nets. Or you may do always as you have done now, turn every river of England into a common sewer, so that you cannot so much as baptize an English baby but with filth, unless you hold its face out of the rain; and even *that* falls dirty. (27:92)

These "very hopes and longings of heaven," which Muir told McChesney "are weighed and measured and branded," are surely not such as "could be made to order like bricks by Yankee machinery." They are of the same order as what Ruskin described as J. M. W. Turner's "dream-gifted" (6:42) acts of informed imagination. Yet they disappoint Muir because their possibilities for "after-development" are as open to the devil's choice as much as the angel's, just as, in the future, was to be the case for Hetch Hetchy.

Perhaps it was the terrible repressive presence of the danger of the devil's choice in his upbringing that led Muir to refuse, at times, to confront the destructive aspect of his creative-destructive vision. Or perhaps it was the experience of being a born-again viewer of the natural world, following his temporary blinding by his industrial accident in 1867. A few days before the letter to McChesney, he wrote about his blinding, "[I]n that terrible darkness I died to light, I lived again, and God who is Light has led me tenderly from light to light to the shoreless ocean of rayless beamless Spirit Light that bathes these holy mountains" (Badè 1924; *LL* 185). Consequently Muir could not understand Ruskin's notions of dark and light, of counterpoint in landscape aesthetics, or the use of the words "mountain gloom" and "mountain glory" in Ruskin's rhetoric. Muir complained to McChesney of Ruskin's "lack of faith in the Scriptures of Nature," calling Ruskin "an infidel to Nature." This is the substance of Muir's earlier complaint to Jeanne Carr, in his famous midnight letter written beside Upper Yosemite Falls, against Ruskin's "idea of foulness" (131) and the cause of Muir's third reservation about Ruskin's suggestion that "Nature is never immoderate" (162).

To Muir's bright, joyous, born-again vision, "mountain gloom" is an oxymoron, and the loyal Badè, the normally skeptical Cohen, and the careful Turner each accept Muir's reading of Ruskin here, even quoting Ruskin in support of Muir's criticisms. However, it may be argued that Muir was misreading Ruskin in 1873, for his own purposes, which were closer to Ruskin's than he cared to admit to McChesney. As I have shown, one need go no further than *Modern Painters*, volume IV, to see not only contrary evidence to the comments that Muir makes on Ruskin to McChesney but points with which Muir himself, in 1873, would be sympathetic. One could argue that the young Muir is simply responding impulsively to language that he has rejected and that in later life he may have come to have an unexpressed respect for Ruskin's work. It could also be argued that this response to aspects of Ruskin's language (dualities, separations) has clouded Muir's ability to see the whole of what Ruskin is saying, with which he would have some sympathy (unity across separations). But there is further evidence that Muir's misreading of Ruskin is a means of distancing himself from what was clearly a congruent source of his thinking.

First, Muir's is not a reading of Ruskin at all; it is a reaction to certain words, impressionistically remembered, in order to develop his own thinking. Second, in his chapter of *Mountain Painters*, volume IV, "Mountain Gloom," Ruskin is trying to "think over" environmental, social, philosoph-

ical, and finally moral "difficulties" more intractable than Muir ever set himself to resolve. What appear to be "conclusions" in Ruskin's writing are actually prefaced by an uncharacteristic tentativeness: "I am in no wise confident of their accuracy, but they may assist the reader in pursuing the enquiry further" (Ruskin 1903, 6:405). In this chapter of *Modern Painters* Ruskin moves from considering natural destructive forces, to perceived gloom, to the popular "love of horror," to Catholicism, to evil, to the suffering without sin of a cab horse, and to moral choice, while recognizing that none of these is quite the same thing. Here Ruskin is crossing cultural boundaries to express a unified vision in a manner that one would expect Muir to applaud. Third, in Ruskin's honest attempt to "consider what actual effect upon the human race has been produced by the generosity, or the instruction of the hills" (6:385), he has in mind such pre-Romantic responses to mountains by early travelers in Britain and the Alps as the words of Daniel Defoe's tour of Westmorland of 1722 in which Defoe describes mountainous Westmorland as a "barren and frightful" place (Defoe 1724, 123). Indeed, one cannot deny that, for us today, a Scottish gully or a mist-shrouded dirty Alpine glacier can indeed induce "Mountain Gloom."

Ruskin uses the word "foul" three times in his "Mountain Gloom" chapter of *Mountain Painters*, twice about what humans have done to their farms (surely something Muir would endorse) and once about just such a Alpine glacier: "the ice itself blackened league after league with loose ruin cast upon it as if out of some long and foul excavation" (Ruskin 1903, 6:410). Ruskin would probably have suggested that Muir's lack of experience of mountain gloom is a result of climate. The western maritime mountains of Britain and the Alps produce a different experience (i.e., wet) from the Sierras, and therefore teach different lessons, as Ruskin knew (see Wheeler 1995, 76–101). But fourth, Ruskin attributes the gloom of certain Alpine peasant cultures to the threat of purgatorial suffering and the pervasive torture images of the Catholic Church. His point is "it is not an evil inherent in the hills themselves" (6:407). Ruskin believed in the overall harmony of opposing forces in nature. Nothing could ultimately be immoderate in nature because it is always counterbalanced in a living dynamic: "But, as we pass beneath the hills which have been shaken by earthquake and torn by convulsion, we find that periods of perfect repose succeed those of destruction" (6:383). This is a point that could have been made by Muir himself from his observations in Yosemite Valley.

Finally, Ruskin's own vision is not based on dualism, as Cohen believes (Cohen 1984, 39). While Ruskin speaks the language of dualism to empha-

size the imperative of human choice, his passionate vision is quite the opposite. But one would not expect, after having read Muir on Ruskin, to find Ruskin writing in "Mountain Gloom" about a painting of nature in this way: "This tendency to dismember and separate everything is one of the eminent conditions of a mind leaning towards vice and ugliness; just as to connect and harmonise everything is that of a mind leaning towards virtue and beauty" (Ruskin 1903, 6:401). Muir is one who has made the latter choice, but his childhood experience of morbid Puritanism has prevented him from seeing the "Mountain Gloom" chapter as a critique of morbid Catholicism. The very mention of the words "darkness," "decay," "foulness," "evil," triggered a reaction that closed his ears to the shifts in the argument. All of the evidence that Ruskin's own views were more complex than Muir's representation of them was available to Muir in 1873. Why did he not notice that, in the chapter on "Stones," Ruskin comments at length on Turner's creative interest in debris? "Turner, however, saw that this very decay having its use and nobleness, the contours of which were significant of it, ought no more to be omitted than, in the portrait of an aged man, the furrows on his hand or brow" (6:377). A possible clue to an answer to this question—why Muir raised these reservations about Ruskin from a clear misreading of the evidence in *Modern Painters*—might lie within Muir's own copies of Ruskin's work, bought much later, and in Muir's mode of note taking during his reading of the edition of 1886, which we have from his own library.

Just as in the case of Muir's copies of Thoreau discussed by Richard F. Fleck (Fleck 1992, 55–64), each of the twelve volumes of Muir's copies of Ruskin's works is annotated with a penciled index on the endpapers. Indeed, such penciled notes are to be found on the endpapers of most of the (scientific) books from Muir's library that are held in the Holt-Atherton Department of Special Collections of the University of the Pacific Libraries, as they are in the remaining seventy-five (literary) books from Muir's library that are held in the Huntington Library. (These two locations result from the different disposals made unknowingly by the descendents of Muir's two daughters after their deaths. See Limbaugh 2003.) The penciled indexes in the popular edition of Ruskin's works published by Wiley and Sons, New York, in 1886, were made on what was probably, for some volumes at least, a third reading, since Muir first referred to his reading of Ruskin in a letter to Jeanne Carr in April 1871 and thanked McChesney for gifts of Ruskin's books in January 1873. It is clear that Muir's reading of the 1886 edition was not only thorough, but was intended to facilitate further study. Volume 7 of this popular edition contains the four books on architecture and includes

three pages of annotated endpapers. On the second page here, "(Yo)" is written three times after notes. Muir is using his reading of Ruskin at this time to inform his thinking about Yosemite. He is also using Ruskin to produce his own thoughts written in these indexes: "Let architects go to the hills for study," or "men like trees grow best in mountains." Volume 8 has four "(Yo)"s on one page, two of them responding to Ruskin's writing about iron palings. For Ruskin's book *The Two Paths*, lecture V, Muir's notes in the endpapers turn iron fences into a new metaphor: "[page] 170 fences. A *hedge* of mountains. A field of *joyful* study (Yo) Well dotted with majestic landmarks that none may remove—(Yo)." Muir is clearly relating Ruskin's images to his own field of study and producing new ways of thinking about his own mountains.

Even when he might be correcting Ruskin in these comments he is really trying out his own formulations. His copy of *The Stones of Venice* is marked with a line in the margin of the text where Ruskin writes "except by reference to the work itself." On the endpapers Muir lets his pencil flow with "Can refer only to the scenery itself holding themselves erect and noble through sun and storm cloud tempest in eternal (everlasting) beauty and majesty to be admired by every human being—Yo." Page 134 of Muir's volume of *Unto This Last* provokes an extended flight of Muir's most purple prose: "nor will man ever be required to live by bread alone. The purple dawns of sunrise and sunset the beauty and strength of the mountains on either hand pointing to Heaven etc." Volume I of *Modern Painters* produces a typical Muirism: "Every Scotchman loves heather a 1000 years before he is born JM." At the back of volume IV we find Muir's mind running on, with no hint of a page reference to indicate what started it: "Tourists ostentatiously hunting for economical pleasures What is the price of Glacier point. Clouds Rest."

From the tone of Muir's letters one might expect to find fiery objections scribbled in his own later copies of Ruskin. But *Modern Painters*, volume IV, which contains the "Mountain Gloom" chapter, has only thirteen pages and topics briefly listed in the index without further annotation. And comments in the margins of the texts of all volumes are even sparser than in the endpapers. A single sentence is rare. More interesting is the scribbled comment like "Glaciers Man Glaciers." "No" is as strong as Muir gets in the margins of his 1886 edition of *Modern Painters*, volume IV. Muir obviously thinks that Ruskin is unaware of glaciation, and on the evidence of certain passages he could, indeed, have gained this impression. For example, Ruskin's illustration of what looks remarkably like a small Half Dome on the road to Chamonix is included for the consideration of its bedding

planes and whether they have been "bent" (Ruskin 1903, 6:183). Ruskin is not concerned about the manner of their exposure by glaciation at this point. But a few chapters later Ruskin provides an illustration to show how glacial striations have been cut against the grain of a particular rock: "The whole of the upper surface of the promontory is wrought by the old glaciers into furrows and striae more notable than anything I ever saw in the Alps" (6:347).

Thus, one may conclude that Muir used Ruskin, certainly after 1886, to hone his own thinking about landscape. Revealed in the detail of this process is the evolution of Muir's individual post-pastoral thinking. Muir's mode of reading is actively seeking not only to learn from Ruskin but to forge his own vision. He is both seeking an integration of knowledge and a separation of his own position from that of Ruskin. I have argued elsewhere that Ruskin's work embodies the elements of the post-pastoral in his vision (Wheeler 1995, 187–94), and in the evidence discussed here one can see the elements of awe, a creative-destructive nature, inner nature connected to outer nature, and a moral concern for landscape and people. But through his method of note taking and annotation Muir creatively finds his own voice springing out of his reading of Ruskin's. Muir's mind is not paying attention to the subtle and wayward shifts of Ruskin's thinking, but to ideas that he can restate or reconfigure for his own purposes in relation to "Yo," his forthcoming book on Yosemite. Muir's reservations about Ruskin in the letters are a dialectical engagement and perhaps a smoke screen. Muir seems concerned to distance his own thinking from Ruskin's, but Muir's vision is actually closer to Ruskin's than he would have his correspondents believe. Muir tells McChesney that Ruskin believes that "Nature . . . is the joint work of God and the devil, and therefore made up of strips and bars of evil and good" (Badè 1924; *LL* 186). Muir hardly needed Ruskin to tell him that any evil found in the mountains was "not an evil inherent in the hills themselves" but in the choices of those who sought to live among them, to exploit them, and to manage them. What both Muir and Ruskin addressed from different perspectives were the issues represented by post-pastoral literature. Their differences, deliberately accentuated by the younger Muir, disguise their common concerns and modes of discourse. Ruskin, essentially anthropocentrically, and Muir, essentially biocentrically, each confronted the dilemmas presented by human presence, influence, and responsibility on the earth.

A further clue to understanding how Muir dialectically used his (mis)reading of Ruskin is revealed in the second paragraph of the letter to McChesney when Muir writes of Ruskin: "His pungent, steel-tempered

sentences compel one to think, and his errors and absurdities are so clearly expressed that they do good rather than harm"—in the hands, of course, of John Muir, whose cultural legacy is remarkably similar to Ruskin's and reveals how a post-pastoral mode of writing can lead to change on behalf of the environment and human life in it. Muir's founding of the Sierra Club in 1892 had its historical parallel in the Guild of Saint George, which Ruskin founded in 1871, and Ruskin was the formative influence in the founding of the National Trust, the forerunner of British national parks. Perhaps it might even be suggested that the notion of national parks, sometimes referred to as America's gift to the world, is not only the idea of a Scot but also, perhaps, standing close behind him, a "graduate of Oxford," as Ruskin called himself, and standing close behind him, Thomas Carlyle. This is not a radical suggestion, but a speculation on the natural evolution of ideas from the kind of dialectical engagement Muir evidently had through his reading of both Ruskin and Carlyle.

In Muir's copy of Carlyle's *Past and Present* he noted on the endpaper, "[page] 219 Land ownership." On page 219 he drew a line down the margin beside the lines "Properly speaking, the Land belongs to these two: To the Almighty God; and to all his Children of Men that have ever worked well on it or that shall ever work well on it." He did not mark the following passage, which clinches the argument: "It is not the property of any generation, we say, but that of all the generations that have worked on it, and of all the future ones that shall work on it." Unmarked in Muir's volume VII of Ruskin is a remarkable passage that strongly suggests the influence of Carlyle. In it Ruskin deploys the Middle English concept of *entail*, a legal term meaning "to bestow as an inalienable possession": "God has lent us the earth for our life: it is a great entail. It belongs as much to those who come after us, and those whose names are already written in the book of creation, as to us; and we have no right by anything we do or neglect, to involve them in unnecessary penalties, or deprive them of benefits which it was in our power to bequeath" (Ruskin 1903, 8:233).

There could be no better expression of the post-pastoral agenda and no better text from which Muir might develop his own post-pastoral vision and the practical expression of it in the notion of national parks. Perhaps it is in this vortex of simultaneous and interactive transatlantic flow of ideas and discourse in the nineteenth century that the notion of the national park, as we now know it, has its true and messy, shared and divided, ecological gestation.

Muir's reconnective, interactive, and discriminating mode of reading

Ruskin clearly informed his ultimate campaigning activity on behalf of his beloved Sierra mountain landscapes. In our own time a campaigner for a beloved wild landscape has used his reading of current American nature writing to forge an interactive, highly discriminating, and ultimately re-connecting form of narrative with which to challenge his own readers. The following chapter considers Rick Bass's remarkably innovative response to the state of American nature writing, *Fiber*.

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CHAPTER SIX

Rick Bass's *Fiber* as a Post-Pastoral Georgic

In chapter 3 Muir's preference for the essay was seen as the most appropriate form for his purposes, although he knew that books would also be needed. Of course, his essays emerged from letters and journals, just as his books emerged from his essays. Muir's play with forms, and with discourses within those forms, resulted from his facing the challenge of mediating multiple ways of knowing place. His rejection of the conventional discourse of the professional scientists and his integration of several discourses to encompass a complex way of knowing while appealing to and influencing a popular readership were at the heart of his interventionist strategy on behalf of, first, the land he passionately loved, and later, the nation's forest reserves. But his ultimate concern was for the future relationship between economic pressures, from, say, loggers, and the ability of the American people to find a healthy way to be at home in, and not just on, their land. In the preceding chapters of this book I argue that Muir has been inventive in his use of discourse and form in the conduct of what I have called a post-pastoral practice. This chapter considers a remarkably original short work by a contemporary writer whose agenda has much in common with the later Muir's: how to use most effectively for political intervention the available modes of writing in the service of campaigning for a forested mountain landscape.

I want to argue that Rick Bass's little book *Fiber* constitutes nothing less than a new literary form—the post-pastoral georgic. I am not sure that I fully understand all of the twists and turns of Bass's short text. Its final sentences in particular still leave me slightly confused in their puzzling shifts of tone. But this very device—sudden shifts of tone—has been the strength of a daring narrative, told by an unreliable narrator, that achieves what I have come to think of as a slightly flawed masterpiece. That it continues to make me think hard is a tribute to the triumph of art over criticism, of mystery over explanation, of the complexity of the text over any reductive

attempt to categorize it. Yet I still want to claim *Fiber* as a new literary form because it might help to demonstrate how this book is a turning point, in my view, away from the current cul-de-sac of American nature writing, of which Muir, in many ways, was a founder.

By "cul-de-sac" I refer to an awestruck, earnest, and ultimately predictable discourse that lies behind the worst of American nature writing, as it does (and I write, of course, from a UK perspective) behind the weakest British writing about the countryside. Michael Cohen has recently published a critique of ecocriticism in which his reservations about "narrative scholarship" are really directed at a broad tendency in American nature writing to be sermonizing about "the kind of life worth living" in the manner of a religious testimonial to place (Cohen 2004, 22). Even more brutal has been Dana Phillips in his accusation that much American nature writing has actually been "writing about a response to nature" (Phillips 2003, 210) in a pious evocation of "mystical oneness." His problem is that in throwing out the "mystical" he's in danger of also losing the important search for connection that is often expressed as a yearning for "oneness."

In the final sentences of *Fiber* the discourse of complacent, cozy, fire-lit, indoor engagement with an environment's urgent crisis seems suspect because it appears to evoke the discourse of escapist pastoral. Yet, for me, it is in the way that *Fiber*, as a whole, outflanks the pastoral that the originality of its achievement lies. In the United States, pastoral literature has an honorable tradition that the Thoreauvian critic Lawrence Buell has described as "counterinstitutional" (Buell 1995, 50) in its positive effects. Certainly Rick Bass's writing has always featured the classic impulse of the European tradition of pastoral to retreat into nature and return with insights that have moral implications for a mostly urbanized society. The danger has always been that pastoral literature might sometimes fail to seek or achieve such redeeming insights and become Leo Marx's "sentimental pastoral" discourse of rural escapism. As discussed in chapter 2, it was the American critic Leo Marx who needed to distinguish between what he called "complex and sentimental kinds of pastoralism" (Marx 1964, 32). Even in the United States, where the pastoral mode is considered to have an integrity that links Crèvecoeur, Thoreau, Muir, and Wendell Berry, the verb expresses the danger. To *pastoralize* is to idealize as an Arcadia—the literary construct that acts as a rural retreat from social and environmental realities. Indeed, it is the predominance in English literature of Marx's "sentimental pastoralism" that has led to the term *pastoral* taking on a pejorative use in the United Kingdom. Bass seems to have come around to this view of his own coun-

try's nature writing. I believe it is the American equivalent of this pastoral escapist complacency that Bass has in mind when he says in *Fiber* that today "storytelling has become so damn weak and safe" (45; all unattributed page references in this chapter are to *Fiber*). In this one hears echoes of the American anti-pastoralists Robinson Jeffers and Edward Abbey, following the English anti-pastoral tradition located in the work of George Crabbe and John Clare.

In contemporary American nature writing much of its storytelling "has become so damn weak and safe" precisely because it can be the formulaic, escapist pastoral that one finds, for example, in the annual anthologies edited by John A. Murray that were published by the Sierra Club and in what Leonard M. Scigaj calls the "cushy limbo" of the nature poetry of Robert Haas (Scigaj 1999, 115). (Murray's advice in his *Nature Writing Handbook* to nature writers was to "edify and entertain" [Murray 1995, 95] rather than to challenge and innovate.) I would not want to denigrate the strengths of the tradition of American nature writing at its best and I recognize its capacity for thought-provoking advocacy in the hands of Aldo Leopold, Terry Tempest Williams, Gary Snyder, and others. But it seems to me that the distinctly American art form of the first-person anecdotal narrative about epiphanies of connection to landscapes seems in danger of becoming repetitious and complacently unoriginal. Perhaps the lack of an American literary criticism, even including ecocriticism, possessed of a rigor to distinguish the sentimental pastoral from the complex pastoral, after Leo Marx provided a rationale for such rigor as long ago as 1964, has not helped the development of the genre in which Bass has been working. To his credit, he seems to be aware of this himself in his narrator's critique of contemporary storytelling.

One of the ways in which Rick Bass avoids the idealizing traps of the pastoral is to base *Fiber* on the practical work of a man who hauls logs. Indeed, his narrator poses this work against that of storytelling: "I thought I was made all along for writing short stories, and maybe one day again I will be—as forests recycle through succession—but this landscape has carved and fit me—it is not I who has been doing the carving—and I can feel, am aware of, my change, so that now what I best fit doing is hauling logs, one at a time" (17). Growing like the forest, within the forest, this man has found his fit in this place—the climax forests of the Yaak Valley in northwest Montana, where Bass himself moved to live the life of a writer. The punch line of this long sentence is the final surprise of "one at a time." This narrator works at hauling logs like an artist, "choosing for my harvest only the wind-tossed or leaning trees, or the trees that are crowded too close together, or

diseased. I try and select individual trees like notes of music. . . . As I choose and select, I listen to that silent music all around me, faint but real, of what I am doing—not imagining, but *doing*" (18–19).

Despite the slightly odd and highly sensitive way this work is conceived here, it is work. Its emphasis is on "not imagining, but *doing*." In this Virgil would recognize not a pastoral, but a georgic discourse. Virgil's *Georgics* (composed 36–29 B.C.) is a poem that serves as a practical guide to vegetable and animal husbandry. This poem has given us the generic name for a literature of rural work in which realism counters any tendencies toward idealization. The narrator of *Fiber* has retreated away from art into a world of "things" and "doing." His concern is to know the names of things in the forest as he gets "in pace—once more—with the land" (27). It emerges from the text that his georgic is really that of the gestural politics of an environmentally sensitive oddball logger. But before exploring the unusual work of this narrator, perhaps I ought to explain why I call this contemporary text a post-pastoral georgic.

One of the ways in which Rick Bass has avoided the traps of sentimental pastoralism in his writing is by combining hard scientific knowledge with surprising narrative devices that have been called "fresh and strange" (Lowell 1989, 11) or "unfamiliar, bizarre" (Weltzien 1998, 23). Indeed his narrative strategy has developed into an exploration of what Terrell Dixon has called "a viable border country" (Dixon 1995, 103) between the tame or domesticated (*Brown Dog of the Yaak*, 1999) and the wild (*The Lost Grizzlies*, 1995), between fiction and nonfiction, between mythic discourse and personal anger, between art and activism. In this Bass is searching, as Muir was, for a discourse adequate to the multiple modes of knowledge that he wants to bring to bear in his literary engagement with place. Bass's books and interviews are punctuated by outbursts of frustration at boundaries, whether it is those between "pure biology" and "fiction" (83), or, as in an essay published just a year after *Fiber*, between art and activism: "Wrestle as I will with the question, and try as I might, I cannot separate the two for any longer than a few months at a time—any more than other things in the world can be kept separate" (Bass 1999, 113).

The result of this integration of fiction and nonfiction, of biology and personal anger, of art and activism is the strange, bizarre narrative form of *Fiber*. So, more than a straightforward georgic, *Fiber* is a book about work that evaluates modes of work—logger/activist; activist/artist—in relation to the crisis of a particular environment. It even implicitly questions the role of the writer himself in producing *The Book of the Yaak* (1996). Was this too

much the work of the artist—the storyteller—and not enough of the activist? Did it fall into the coziness of the pastoral and fail to do anything practical for the threatened valley itself? Did the earlier book call forth, as it were, a new mode in the later book that broke the old forms of American nature writing?

The four books of Virgil's *Georgics* were concerned with how best to work the land for the long-term benefit of both that land and its future husbandry. The delicacy of the husbandry of trees in book 2 is millennia away from the crudity of clear-cutting the old growth of the Yaak Valley. In *The Georgics* the characteristic climax-growth woods of different regions are celebrated as independent of human care or harvesting:

> What a joy it is
> To view Cytorus surging with its boxwoods
> And Naryx with its pines! What a joy it is
> To look on land beholden to no drag-hoes
> Nor any human care! (Virgil 1982, 91)

Fiber is a post-pastoral form of georgic partly because what begins as a working logger's tale becomes one that questions the very modes of work of the writer himself, the ultimate purpose of which is to urge on the reader some acts of responsibility for our ecological relationships in relation to a specific place where that relationship is in crisis. In Rick Bass's text, consciousness, which since Virgil's time had seemed to be what separated our species from the rest of nature (specifically in Lucretius's *De Rerum Natura*), has been used to attempt to heal that separation. Here the imagination, under the urgent pressure of a specific ecological crisis, has forced a new form of narrative out into our culture. It is a superb example of Gary Snyder's contention that the spirit of Coyote, totem of the shape-shifting capacity of the human imagination, combined with the Bear totem's boldness in "protection of the wild" is what might bring us back into a right relationship with our home, the earth itself (Snyder 1995, 171). *Fiber* is also an example, together with narrative scholarship, of a new form emerging out of the American pastoral tradition's struggle to meet the needs of our current crisis, which has been anticipated by Leo Marx (Marx 1992, 222) and Lawrence Buell (Buell 1995, 51). Michael P. Branch has coined the term "environmental elegiad" for Bass's combination of elegy for what is being lost in the Yaak and jeremiad in order to prevent it (Branch 2001, 242). For Branch too, Bass's recent work demands new terms, and this arises from Branch's study of the mixture of grief and anger in what he calls Bass's "Yaak-tivist" writing

(Branch 1991, 226). But in the specific case of *Fiber* Bass is struggling to find a way past the traps of the sentimental pastoral with a narrative that is essentially a postmodern georgic. What is new and challenging for the reader is not so much the emotional mix as the risks the narrative takes.

I now want to look more closely at the narrative strategy of *Fiber* by referring to my personal first experience of this narrative. It's a rare and exciting moment when you know that you are in the presence of a masterpiece. This gradually became clear to me as I listened to Rick Bass read his new story "Fiber" at the second conference of ASLE (the Association for Studies in Literature and Environment) in 1997. We were in Missoula, Montana, where the Bitterroot River meets the Clarke Fork. Since traveling during the last decade to the U.S. conferences of ASLE, as well as to the Community and Environment conferences at the University of Nevada, Reno, and at Weber State University, I'd realized that Rick Bass was a writer that I needed to get to know. I'd bought his two most recent books, *The Book of the Yaak* and *The Sky, the Stars, the Wilderness*, and been intrigued as to the next development of a well-known nature writer whose ecological thinking turns toward urgent advocacy in *The Book of the Yaak* but whose lyrical celebration of connectedness in the novellas of the later book raised again, for me, the problems of coziness and "safety" in current American nature writing.

As his first public reading of the then unpublished *Fiber* unfolded, in a series of breathtaking narrative twists that surprised the audience, Rick Bass himself seemed to be expressing the frustration of an artist whose form had become too satisfyingly comfortable to change anything, while the clear-cutting of old-growth forest encroached on the very valley he has been enthusiastically celebrating in his recent book *The Book of the Yaak*. I suddenly realized that I was hearing a cunning, passionate leap out of the "weak and safe" and into a new literary form. In the story *Fiber* the narrator explains that he is in the fourth phase of his life that has moved first from the "taking" of the geologist, then to the creativity of the story writer, to the activist on the run from the law, and finally to the "giving" of his present phase as "the log fairy." He cuts fallen timber for the sawmills, but his best logs he places at night individually in the trucks of sleeping loggers or at the gates of a sawmill. The mystified locals call the unknown person who is doing this "the log fairy." There are early hints that this is to be no ordinary narrative. In the same sentence that the narrator admits that the boundaries between fiction and reality are blurred, he also points out that the function of storyteller and activist can be blurred: "Neither you nor I can really be sure of how much of any story is fiction, or art, and how much

of it is activism" (4). At the end of the second paragraph of the book, the narrator distances the reader from his narrative by commenting on public responses to his earlier stories: "They would write letters to me then and talk about the characters in those stories as if they were real people, which strangely saddened me" (3).

Fiber is a narrative of only fifty small pages printed in a book that is beautifully designed and made by the University of Georgia Press. What Bass manages to achieve within the modest scope of four tightly written parts is nothing short of miraculous. *Fiber*, as I have suggested, does perhaps have flaws that I'll examine later—moments of final uncertainty of mode, and uncertainty about the role of the illustrations—but it is a narrative that takes huge risks for such a slim volume.

At first, the reader might assume that the runaway of the opening sentence is a romantic who wants to be shaped by this landscape, who knows and respects the trees he is working with, and who is working toward an environmentally attuned future with his wife and children away from "the omnipresent hypercapitalism here at post-consumer century's end" (8). After learning from the mountain forest each day, "back home, in your cabin, your dreams swirl, as if you are still traveling, still walking, even in your sleep, across this blessed landscape, with all its incredible diversity, and the strength that brings" (10). This beautifully orchestrated voice then jumps to admitting, in the same rhythmic phrasing, that back in the first phase of his adult life he took oil as a geologist; jewelry, which he hung on trees; boats, which he burned; and cars, which he sank. "I would look at my two hands and think, What are these for, if not to take?" There is, he tells us, a warrant out for his arrest.

In his book Rick Bass teases his audience with the difficulty of interpreting this narrator's voice. The writer's autobiographical connection of his oil geologist past, for example, is both a red herring in the development of *this* narrative and very much to the point in terms of Bass's personal development. As I listened to his reading, the voice of the narrator in the story seemed to change. One moment I was listening to a narrator who was a lyrical, learning naturalist: "The shape of the land beneath the forests is like the sluggish waves in an ancient, nearly petrified ocean—the waves of the northern Rockies sliding into the waves of the Pacific Northwest—so that it is like being lost, or like having found the rich dense place you were always looking for" (9). Then I was listening to a logger narrator who had turned his earlier playful capitalist self into a newly playful "log fairy," an activist of small, theatrical, knowing gestures: "A thing I do sometimes, when I have

a log I'm really proud of, is to haul it out and carry it on my back and place it in the road next to some other logger's truck, like a gift" (20). At the next moment I was listening to a narrator who was a slightly mad environmental activist, starving his family in the backwoods of Montana while he played out a fantasy of his own: "Whenever a new car or truck enters the valley, I run and hide. I scramble to the top of a hill and watch through the trees as it passes. They can never get me. They would have to get the land itself" (36).

It was from a cabin in backwoods Montana that the Unabomber cycled to post the bombs that, during a seventeen-year campaign in the 1970s and 1980s, killed three people and maimed twenty in an attempt to "stop technology." But this narrator is not a Unabomber. He merely hauls logs, although the very restraint of his gestures is intended to be more than puzzling: "I want to shock and offend. Hauling *logs*? My moderation seems obscene in the face of what is going on on this landscape, and in this country—the things, the misery, for which this country is so much the source, rather than a source of healing or compassion" (41).

The third section of the book ends with a statement of the ineffectiveness of both the activist and the artist. First the artist's work is rendered inadequate to the world crisis in terms that are an echo of Bertolt Brecht's words written in 1938:

> What kind of times are they, when
> To talk about trees is almost a crime
> Because it implies silence about so many horrors? (Brecht 1976, 318)

Bass's narrator says: "What story, what painting, does one offer up to refute Bosnia, Somalia, the Holocaust, Chechnya, China, Afghanistan, or Washington D.C.? What story or painting does one offer up or create to counterbalance the ever-increasing sum of our destructions?" (40). The narrator has the belief that natural "rampant beauty will return" once the world's terrors have subsided "like a fire sweeping across the land." But an urgency has both demanded activism and witnessed its ineffectiveness. Bass typically suggests both that the activist needs the artist and that the artist needs the activist. While "activism is becoming the shell, the husk, where art once was," its hollowness suggests that it also needs the imaginative flair, perhaps the communicative originality of the artist. Meanwhile the artist, especially the nature writer, is a dilettante until rescued by the sense of purpose of the activist. So, "the activist is the emergency-room doctor trying to perform critical surgery on the artist" (42).

The final section of this narrative begins with a breathtaking twist: "There

is, of course, no story: no broken law back in Louisiana, no warrant, no fairy logs." Because "storytelling has gotten so damn weak and safe," it is inadequate to confront the rape of the Yaak on behalf of an American exploitation of natural resources in which, Bass says, even the Sierra Club, "bastion of radicalism," tactically connives. The Yaak could be the "genetic pipeline" for the regeneration of wilderness in the West, we are told, but the timber company's vice president sits on the board of directors of the Nature Conservancy's Montana chapter (48). The timber company, Plum Creek, the narrator tells us, "owns the cork to the bottleneck" of the valley. But there is still time to "do the right thing."

The narrator here becomes defiant: "If you think I'm going to say *please* after what they've already done to this landscape, you can think again." But the narrator of *Fiber*, who by this time at the live reading in Missoula had clearly become the author himself, apparently seemed to hear his own voice and realize what he must sound like. Bass continued reading from the text: "I recognize the tinny sound of my voice. I know when an edge is crossed, in art: when a story floats or drifts backward or forward, beyond its natural confines. And I understand I am a snarling wolverine, snapping illogically at everything in my pain, snapping at everyone—at fellow artists, and at fellow environmentalists" (49). At this point in the Missoula reading Rick Bass was overcome by emotion. An edge had, indeed, been crossed beyond the proud defiance of his own emotional tone. He had to regain his composure in order to speak the following lines from the text: "I am going to ask for help, after all. I have to ask for help. This valley gives and gives and gives. It has been giving more timber to the country, for the last fifty years, than any other valley in the Lower 48, and still not one acre of it is protected as wilderness" (50).

Apparently some skeptical members of the audience felt that this was a hyped-up "performance" on Bass's part. But I know from public readings myself that you can get affected by your own work when you realize that this audience in particular is hearing even the most subtle emotional subtext while you are speaking. It can be disturbing if you let yourself realize at the time that they may be understanding things about your text that even you yourself do not. Many singers have to distance themselves slightly from the emotional content of what they are singing if it is not to overwhelm their ability to perform it. The singer Sting made precisely this point in a TV interview on British television recently: "You can't let yourself think too much about what you are singing or you couldn't sing it." So the backlash of skeptical contributors to the ASLE Listserv discussion during the week following

the reading, writing in indignation at having been emotionally manipulated by this "false" breakdown of Bass the reader, were really missing the point. It was, in my view, precisely because Bass, a founding member of ASLE, was reading to an ASLE audience that he knew as he was reading that they understood more of what he was asking for than any other audience. He was asking for help, through his story, in front of the very four hundred people in the country most likely to actually help. And this awareness got to him at that tricky moment in his reading when a proud defiance became a vulnerable plea.

By this stage in the narrative, the narrator has made two surprising twists, the first having been the declaration that "There is no story" in the opening of part IV, and the second being the backing down of "I am going to ask for help, after all." So the third twist is that, having merged narrator and author in the previous two twists so that we are now convinced that a personal plea is being made by the author (endorsed by his emotional breakdown in the Missoula reading), he writes: "I load the logs slowly into the back of my ragged truck and drive them slowly to the mill in protest" (50). This immediately suggests that the narrator is still the log fairy, or is speaking in the voice of the log fairy. One might put this down to Bass's final playful flourish of strangeness for the reader—his desire to keep the enigma of art active until the end. But the result is misjudged, in my view, because he surely needs the reader to believe he is serious in his final plea—the fourth twist of the tale—for somebody to "put this story in the President's, or Vice President's, hands." At the end of the book is a list of twelve addresses, headed by that of the U.S. president, to whom the reader is urged to write letters on behalf of the Yaak. Michael Cohen reminds us that the letter to a governmental agency might be "the most important single literary genre" (Cohen 2004, 24). My feeling is that one would only be inclined to write such a letter if one was convinced by the author's pleas. But in the book's final lines three enigmas are created with what appears to be the intention to distance or confuse the reader. Here, it seems, art is still fighting a rearguard with advocacy in the narrative's last throes. It is as though the author cannot relinquish the role of the log fairy narrator. The book concludes with these lines after "put this story in the President's, or Vice President's, hands":

> Or read it aloud to one of them by firelight on a snowy evening with a cup of cider within reach, resting on an old wooden table.
>
> The firelight on the spines of books on the shelf flickering as if across the bones or skeletons of things; and outside, on that snowy night, the valley hold-

ing tight to the eloquence of a silence I can no longer hear over the roar of my own saw.

Somebody please do this. Somebody please help. (50)

There are three aspects of the story's ending that seem to be at work here to puzzle the reader. The first produces a skepticism, I have discovered, among my (British) student readers (which I share myself) about the sentimental coziness of that snowy evening, overloaded as it is with firelight, cider (coyly "within reach"), and that old wooden table (presumably made of timber from the rape of the Yaak's old growth). The second puzzle is the grammar of the next sentence that is softened to the extent of omitting an active verb. For me, this is not poetic; it is "poesy" (in both senses). Third is the reappearance of the logger's saw in an apparent reversion to the voice of the log fairy. With the provocative perverseness of an Edward Abbey, this logger cannot hear the eloquent silence of this valley. (Is this the Yaak, or a different valley in which sits the listening president or vice president?) It would hardly make sense for Bass himself to be sawing in such a way that he was dead to the valley's eloquence. I could strain to make clever, positive interpretations of these three enigmas in this crucial passage, but that would be to sidestep my suspicion that there is a problem for the reader at the very moment before the final request for the reader's action. There may be a way of understanding Bass's intention here, however flawed it might be in execution, as a carnivalesque play with conventions and expectations. But a sense of the complexity of elements at work here can be shown by a consideration of what I would nominate as the second possible flaw in *Fiber*.

In his earlier work Rick Bass has undoubtedly been guilty of sentimental pastoralism at times. It is hard to celebrate a place or an animal without appearing to be indulgently lyrical. This is a problem shared, of course, by visual artists. The cover painting for *Fiber* by Montana artist Russell Chatham is a moody, even gloomy, anti-pastoral evocation of forest. One suspects that its impression of misty wetness is authentic to that place. But do the woodcuts by Bass's wife, Elizabeth Hughes Bass, that accompany the text, tend toward a pastoralization of it? The butterfly that announces part IV of the text and its pulling of the rug from beneath the narrative, seems to bear no relation to the tension created for the reader at this point by the story. The prettifying of the text with art cut from wood seems to be unaware of the ambiguity of the roles of both art and wood in the text. If it were argued that these images are aware of that ambiguity they would

be read as counterpointing the tensions in the text. On the other hand they do represent the creative relationship with both wood and place in both their mode and content. The woodcuts echo both the art that the narrator and his wife "do not talk about anymore" (25) and the limitations of the art of both of them: "What story or painting does one offer up or create to counterbalance the ever-increasing sum of our destructions?" (40). In fact, the notion of "counterbalance" is visually present in the woodcuts in form and in content. The illustrations include not only evidence of wild creatures but also books, a truck, a log cut from a stump. Indeed, the first two images in the book are a counterpoint of technique, the white making the image of a fern in the first and the black making an image of a flower in the second. The same trick is played with a paw print on page 21 and page 25 and with the butterfly on page 26 and page 43. Does the play in the relationship between woodcuts and text do anything other than pastoralize the book as an object? Is the play in this relationship another aspect of carnivalesque risk in *Fiber*?

Throughout this narrative Bass has used devices to surprise the reader and unsettle his text. Inevitably, reviewers have already started characterizing the fractured narrative technique of *Fiber* as "postmodern." Certainly Bass has created a classic case of "the unreliable narrator." To catch the spirit of this I have used the word "playful," while showing that it is intended for serious purposes that should lead to readers actually putting pen to paper on behalf of the Yaak Valley. This is what has come to be called, after Bakhtin, "carnivalesque" discourse. Bakhtin wrote of what he called "the complex nature of carnival laughter":

> It is, first of all, a festival laughter. Therefore it is not an individual reaction to some isolated "comic" event. Carnival laughter is the laughter of all the people [for example, all people who are used to reading a narrative within the genre conventions that appear to be presented to them]. Second, it is universal in scope; it is directed at all and everyone, including the carnival's participants [that is, the author is also present in the narrative for the reader]. The entire world is seen in its droll aspect, in its gay relativity [the way a logger could come close to being a log fairy]. Third, this laughter is ambivalent: it is gay, triumphant, and at the same time mocking and deriding. It asserts and denies, it buries and revives. (Bakhtin 1984, 11–12)

The risk of Bass's "carnivalesque" ambiguity in the final passage of *Fiber* may be intended to act in the manner of the last line of Ted Hughes's epic poem sequence *Cave Birds*: "At the end of the ritual / up comes a goblin" (Hughes 1978b, 62). Just when the reader (the witness to the ritual that is art)

thought it was all over, another enigma emerges to provoke further thought, even to revive the ritual in a new way: "It asserts and denies, it buries and revives," says Bakhtin. But the result seems to me to be merely an artistic confusion that will defuse further action on the reader's part.

Discussing good advice for writers from Hemingway in his essay published in the year following publication of *Fiber*, Bass dismisses the "ten usual rules for writing" and goes on to characterize his own form of narrative risk taking: "Beyond that, it is all about how far you can leap, how far you can fly—how far you can fall and still come back" (Bass 1999, 97). In *Fiber*, fiction has, in fact, leapt into activism, and, more important, the threatened reality of a particular landscape has been served by the flight of this new form of fiction. If he has fallen in the final passage of the book, it is retrieved by the passionate, cunning flight of the whole. Like Muir's *My First Summer in the Sierra*, or the 1953 story of Frenchman Jean Giono, *The Man Who Planted Trees*, this is a book that will become a benchmark in the imaginative power of storytelling on behalf of a neglected and abused environment. With *Fiber* Bass has not just achieved his most profound work to date, but the art of the storyteller has moved on in terms of what the imagination can do for real places. At the same time, the act of reading fiction has been reconnected to responsibility for a relationship with environment by a demand for activism.

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CHAPTER SEVEN

Walking into Narrative Scholarship

Muir's sense of himself as a mountaineer was present even during his reading of the works of others. The development of his own thinking and writing about his experience as a mountaineer, and, indeed, his personal conception of a mountaineer, was informed by his mode of reading. Reference was made in chapter 5 to the seventy-five largely literary books from Muir's personal library held in the Huntington Library. In each of them Muir has, as usual, made himself an index of page references and notes of topics on the endpapers. Many of these annotations pick up on references to mountains and prompt annotations about mountaineering and walking. In the two pages of index he wrote in pencil for himself on the endpapers of the 1895 book *Self-Culture* is the note of a page for future reference: "98 Mountaineering." On this page Muir has drawn a line down beside the text of the following passage: "Wordsworth in his 'Excursion,' when the sky began to look cloudy, gives, as a reason for going on with his mountain perambulation, that though a little rain may be disagreeable to the skin, the act of giving up a fixed purpose, in view of a slight possible inconvenience, is dangerous to the character." Muir has written in his index, "There is much wisdom here. We do not live in a world in which a man can afford to be discouraged by trifles." Clearly Muir attaches great significance to his approach toward walking in the steepest places. There is more than "mountain perambulation" going on here.

Muir's index to his volume of Coleridge's *Lectures on Shakespeare* begins, "38 Mtneering," and marked in the text is Coleridge's line "Why has nature given limbs, if they are not to be applied to motion and action." In the index to volume 5 of the forty-six volumes of *A Library of the World's Best (Literature Ancient and Modern)* Muir writes, "8 *Ex* Natural joy of vigorous use of limbs." But most significantly, in the index to his 1896 edition of Sir Thomas Browne's *Religio Medici*, Muir wrote, in handwriting that is hard to decipher, "57 . . . Nothing [?] here to daunt the mtneer. Can find way up + down most anywhere at intervals of in for miles + make a pleasure of it."

In chapter 5 Muir's method of reading Ruskin was shown to be one of

both integration and separation. The intensity of Muir's wider reading experience here, which moved him to put these notes in the endpapers, is another indication of his desire to integrate modes of knowing from all sources of our culture toward the development of his own writing and especially his thinking about mountaineering and walking. In chapter 10 I consider in some detail what Muir actually meant by his use of the term *mountaineer*. Here I make a link between walking into a landscape and the insights to be gained by doing that while undertaking the comparatively recent form of ecocritical writing that has come to be known as narrative scholarship. Frankly, for Muir, Thoreau's essay "Walking" must have barely scratched the surface of an understanding of the meaning of walking. More than Thoreau, Muir understood what the complete experience of walking in a landscape could be for a writer.

In her book *Wanderlust* (2000), Rebecca Solnit has written a cultural history of the role and meaning of walking for the human species in various aspects of its culture, from recreation to political protest. It begins by exploring the history of the connection between walking and thinking in a chapter on perambulating philosophers. Jean-Jacques Rousseau is quoted as saying, "I can only meditate when I am walking. When I stop I cease to think; my mind works only with my legs" (Solnit 2000, 14). A later chapter describes Wordsworth's habit of composing verse in the rhythm of his walking along the grass terrace at Rydal Mount. This could be frightening to local people on the road that ran on the other side of the hedge, as they later complained to Canon Rawnsley about "Mr Wudworth's bumming": "And then he would start a bumming, and it was bum, bum, bum, stop; then bum, bum, bum, reet down til t'other end" (Rawnsley 1968, 18). In his recent biography of John Clare, Jonathan Bate emphasizes Clare's habit of walking out to go "rhyming," although this could result in frights for the poet, as Clare recorded: "In one of these rambles I was in a narrow escape of being taken up as a poacher" (Bate 2003, 109). But in *Wanderlust* Solnit includes her reflections on her own walking, as a *flâneuse* on her local streets of San Francisco or on a political march for peace, as part of her cultural narrative about the meanings that different kinds of walking can generate. Thus her investigation into the meaning of walking not only includes her own experiences but contextualizes them in the great traditions of the *flâneur* and the political march, for example. It is from such mutual meaning-making resulting from the integration of reading and being, of historical research and personal experience, that narrative scholarship derives its distinctive strength.

Rebecca Solnit's previous book, *Savage Dreams: A Journey into the Landscape Wars of the American West* (1994), tells the personal story of her engagement with controversial issues embedded in the landscapes on each side of the Sierra Nevada: the Nevada desert and Yosemite Valley. Both *Wanderlust* and *Savage Dreams* contain elements of narrative criticism that arise from walking. In *Savage Dreams* Solnit walks in the Nevada desert with protesters against the Nevada Test Site on land that is still owned by the Shoshone Indians. In Yosemite Valley Solnit walks in search of an almost forgotten cultural history of what is often thought of as a classic unpeopled wilderness, in part through the wide circulation of the photographs of Ansel Adams. Her interest is in three aspects of Yosemite: as "an indigenous homeland, a battleground [and] a tourist attraction" (Solnit 1994, 230). Solnit argues that as an archetype of American landscape painting and photography, made famous through the work of Albert Bierstadt in painting as much as by Ansel Adams in photography, the valley is thought of in terms of its natural history as though it has no human history: "It has become easy to believe that Yosemite has no significant human history; and thereby that human history is not part of the landscape." Solnit reclaims the indigenous people's history in the valley by proving that, despite the infamous first (white) entry to the valley by the Mariposa Battalion to remove the Indians in 1851, they have actually had a continuous presence right up to the Ahwahneechee descendent in park service uniform, Jay Johnson, whom Solnit "discovers" to be currently employed in the service of the landscape. Solnit points out that, under the regulations of the park that he serves, he will no longer be eligible to live in the valley where he was born when he retires.

As an art historian and environmental activist who uses walking as a mode of research as well as a subject of research, Solnit has many brilliant insights into the cultural history and significance of Yosemite, especially into the negative effects of having created a national park there. Always thinking critically and politically, Solnit has an alert curiosity as she wanders through both the landscape and her reading, which brings her back to Muir.

Solnit's critique of Muir in *Savage Dreams* as a reclusive wilderness sage whose writing encouraged a perception of the valley as wild and unpeopled is based on a common myth Muir himself perpetuated in *My First Summer in the Sierra*. Chapter 3 demonstrates the more complex truth of Muir's commuting between the valley and the Bay area. Ultimately Muir needed to be a more rounded authority, as much scientist as sage, if the arguments of his conservation politics were to be successful in *Our National Parks*. But we find

Solnit attacking Muir in an argument about food being "a principal means of experiencing nature" for some indigenous people, "a means profoundly absent from such nature experiences as the official version of Yosemite. . . . For John Muir the farm had been an appalling ordeal of forced labor, and it is not surprising that he found no pleasure in seeing the landscape as nourishment; it was instead an escape not only from the social but from the practical" (Solnit 1994, 266). I have been arguing to the contrary, that the very qualities in Muir's work that distinguish it as post-pastoral are those that combine a concern for landscape and for people. Indeed, the founding of the Sierra Club by Muir in 1892 was for both "social" and "practical" purposes: to ensure that the people of the future might find renewal through direct contact with nature in the new Yosemite National Park.

But what is particularly interesting about *Savage Dreams* is the mode of its unfolding narrative. The narrative follows the writer's personal experience in walking as a means of discovering how a continuing human cultural history connects with the natural history. Solnit's insights are not beyond being challenged, but their mode of creation is to be celebrated. With her nose to the ground, sniffing out the cultural tensions around her, Solnit walks into her landscape wars. It was logical that her next book would be a cultural history of walking. This is what brings her writing in these two books within the sphere of "narrative scholarship" that is perhaps best exemplified by two groundbreaking texts that are based on more personal stories of reconnecting reading, thinking, and walking.

In different ways Ian Marshall's *Story Line* and John Elder's *Reading the Mountains of Home*, both of which appeared in 1998, exemplify the recent development within ecocriticism that integrates ways of knowing and mediating. Narrative scholarship—telling the story of how a personal engagement with culture and with landscape has produced insights for the writer—is a term first used by Scott Slovic in an unpublished conference paper (Slovic 1994). Actually, narrative scholarship has, in a sense, been an assumption behind American nature writing since John Muir's first published essays. (It is no coincidence that Slovic is the author of a book titled *Seeking Awareness in American Nature Writing* [1992].) This kind of writing is generally frowned upon in the United Kingdom with the suspicion that such personal narratives are probably too self-indulgent and uncritical. This is one of the reasons why a substantial body of nature writing of the American kind has never been developed in Britain outside conventional travel writing and naturalists' books. There are exceptions, such as the work of the Scottish nature writer Jim Crumley (see his *A High and Lonely Place*, 2000), follow-

ing in the tradition of naturalist Seton Gordon (*Days with the Golden Eagle*, 1927); Jim Perrin from Wales (*River Map*, 2001), in the tradition of William Condry (*Snowdonia*, 1987); and from Ireland Tim Robinson (*Stones of Arran*, 1990), following Maurice O'Sullivan (*Twenty Years A-Growing*, 1933). I discuss below whether narrative scholarship is self-indulgent or lacking in self-criticism in the writings of Marshall and Elder about their walking journeys, but it is significant that the recent development of narrative scholarship could only have come out of the U.S. tradition of nature writing and its related ecocriticism. Recently UK Poet Laureate Andrew Motion, reviewing a new biography of D. H. Lawrence, regretted the continuing neglect of Lawrence's "eco-consciousness," especially in his poetry that "in the old days was generally liked but downgraded as 'nature writing' " (*Guardian Review*, 5 March 2005, 10). Again, there is a brilliant exception in the recent book by the English nature writer Richard Mabey titled *Nature Cure*, which is perhaps the first UK work of narrative scholarship. Certainly Mabey is the first person in the United Kingdom to admit to being a "nature writer" in the American mold, although he qualified this with the preface "so-called" and with quotation marks (Mabey 2005, 23). But, interestingly, Mabey is aware of the development of U.S. and UK ecocriticism, which he explains (completely inadequately) to his UK readership in a footnote as "the literary wing of deep ecology" (230).

It is a mark of the way the American ecocritical community spawns, exchanges, and develops ideas unselfishly that the originator of the notion of narrative scholarship is acknowledged by Ian Marshall to be Scott Slovic. Slovic has, in turn, happily encouraged Marshall to turn the idea into practice through the making of his book *Story Line: Exploring the Literature of the Appalachian Trail*. Ian Marshall quotes Slovic's urging ecocritics to "encounter the world and literature together, then report on their conjunctions" (Slovic 1994). Going further, Marshall writes that "sometimes our lives and the literature we read help us to understand critical theories" (Marshall 1998, 8). In *Story Line* he goes on to demonstrate how writing that moves between three centers of attention can each feed off the other to make a new kind of book. Firstly Marshall is writing about his hiking experiences on the Appalachian Trail, secondly he is writing about his reading on the trail of selected texts about the places he is walking through, and thirdly he is writing about his reflections on theoretical issues confronting ecocriticism. Weaving between these three areas is a post-pastoral approach to his retreat to the Appalachians that derives from Marshall's awareness that he is writing ecocriticism. (Marshall is a former chair of the Association for

Studies in Literature and Environment [ASLE], which brings together ecocritics and creative writers through its activities, including its journal, *ISLE*.) I take it for granted that most ecocritics writing today would wish to aspire to the post-pastoral if they are engaged in writing in the pastoral tradition of retreat and return.

Ian Marshall also knows the meaning of Wordsworth's words marked by Muir, "that though a little rain may be disagreeable to the skin, the act of giving up a fixed purpose, in view of a slight possible inconvenience, is dangerous to the character." Over twenty years Marshall walked the Appalachian Trail in sections, always taking books with him and often also taking fellow ecocritics, with whom he held conversations along the way about theoretical issues triggered by each of the specific books. In the shelters along the trail Marshall reflected in his journal about both his immediate experiences on the journey and knotty problems of literary theory. All this is integrated in a perfectly natural way that would have been resisted in the past by both conventional nature writing on the one hand and academic literary criticism on the other. In explaining his practice of perambulating narrative scholarship, Marshall makes a number of statements that are pertinent to the central argument of this book:

> Narrative scholarship is a way of putting into practice the ecological principle of interconnectedness. To look at something from some objective distance implies that you are outside it, not part of it. To be aware of our role not just as an observer but as a participant, as part and parcel of the world, is a healthy attitude to apply not just to studies of the natural world but to explorations of literature as well. . . . The purpose [of the scholarly study of literature] is not simply to understand literature but to help us understand our lives, and sometimes our lives and the literature we read help us understand critical theories. What I'm attempting to practice is an ecology of reading, where life, literature, and theory interconnect and merge in a meaningful way, everything hitched to everything else. (Marshall 1998, 8)

The last phrase is, of course, borrowed from Muir, and what is missing from this list of interconnections is Marshall's own nature writing in the tradition of Muir. He goes on to point out that narrative scholarship follows the model of nature writing by using the first-person point of view to situate the writer in the natural world. But Marshall makes no claims for his own mediation of the Appalachians in his own narrative of engagement with that landform. One of the interesting features of Marshall's writing is the way literary theory raises questions of perception beyond the contexts of

literature that use theory as a tool for thinking about being in the world as a writer, reader, conversationalist, and hiker.

This mode of writing breaks through the old boundaries maintained by academia. Marshall's first-person writing is fired by a love of literature and place and walking. He is exploring this physical landscape, hundreds of miles of it, on foot, partly for the sheer fun of being there and the challenge to the self to do so, and partly because some of its literature "has moved and touched me." Marshall is bearing witness to a culture in nature derived from both a rich range of literature and the "hiking community" of the Appalachian Trail. "It seems to me odd to write about things you love as if they're only objects of study. . . . Walking the terrain I've known mainly through the pages of books, is to bring the stories *back* to earth" (Marshall 1998, 9).

As a means of examining Marshall's achievement in *Story Line* I want to consider one chapter titled "Horace Kephart's 'Man's Game' and the Community of *Our Southern Highlanders*." The subtlety of Marshall's insights is gained by the nature writer's technique of juxtapositions of parallel, but quite different, sections of text dealing with different subject matter, often in different modes of writing. This chapter includes an explanation of the community walking the trail (it has its own language, currency in Snickers Bars, and nicknames for through hikers); scholarly study of Horace Kephart's two early-twentieth-century books; details of hiking a section of the trail named by Kephart and conversation with his friend about Kephart's motives; and the story of pairing up on the trail with the hiker named Wolverine and the story beyond the trail of Wolverine's relationship with Puck. As these sections are repeatedly taken up and left, to be taken up again within the chapter, Marshall also has a running debate with Puck about what he took to be her patronizing day hikers in a comment in a trail register that he reads before actually meeting her. Here the issue of diversity and status within this culture of walkers is itself the subject of ethical debate in this work of walking narrative scholarship. And in this form of writing this is not a matter of distanced moral reflection but part of a lived dialogue between reflective hikers sharing a path through a demanding landscape. This is a caring community of mostly separated hikers testing their self-sufficiency and inner resources on the same trail over the same mountains.

One of the themes that recurs through this section of Marshall's book is the tension between the self and community: self-sufficiency in historical Appalachian Highlanders' living with nature and the quest for the self in trail hikers' commitment to the demands of nature versus the need for

community and the desire for companionship. This is an echo of the familiar tension between civilization and the reclusive pioneer in American culture that may historically be located in these mountains, but extends beyond them. At times Marshall discusses these matters explicitly both with his companions and in his textual reflections; at others we simply have the story of Wolverine and Puck that ends the chapter with Marshall reporting without comment that after living together in Seattle for a while they split up and Wolverine returned to hiking the trail for a third consecutive year, alone.

The result of this range of reference and resonance is more than the sum of its parts, and it is hard to do more than hint at the depth and richness of perceptions Marshall accumulates in the way these sections speak to each other. So let me just quote a sentence or two from the different sections and allow them to reverberate here:

> I feel like I am surrounded by friends. Some of them I have not even met. . . . The trail begins in a wilderness, a testing ground for the self, the unbounded territory of individual freedom. But it turns out that it leads to a friendly town where Main Street is about a foot wide and two thousand miles long and where folks say hello to strangers. Maybe it's home. (Marshall 1998, 79)

> They had a lot of fun, but Wolverine said he did not have much time to be alone. He was with people, establishing relationships with *them*, and not with nature or himself.

> In the course of *Our Southern Highlanders* (1913), Kephart tries to negotiate a middle ground between his enthusiasm for the wild, which he sees very much as the realm of individual freedom, and his desire to join the human community of the mountains.

> It's not just the counterculture who are out here in the woods—it's mainstream America, and here is maybe the one place we listen to each other. (84)

> While Kephart finds fault with much in the social codes of the southern highlanders, he remains impressed by them for exhibiting the "manly" virtues that he celebrates in *Camping and Woodcraft* (1906): self-reliance, independence, individualism, stoicism, freedom. They are a people formed by the wilderness, and they know it "for a tyrant, void of pity and of mercy, from whom nothing can be wrung without toil and the risk of death." (85)

> It's a catch-22: civilization needs [the southern highlanders'] virtues [Kephart seems to be saying], the classic American virtues that arose from contact with

> the wild. But once civilization arrives, those virtues disappear. Freedom and independence seem incompatible with civilization and difficult to accommodate within a community. (86)
>
> When I tell Puck that I chastised her in a register for putting down day hikers, she says I misunderstood what she was trying to say. But she does not take offense. We hike that day past a place called the Pinnacle, and find four copperheads in a crack between two boulders at the summit, bundled and twined together in a sinuous snaky mass. (87)

Taken separately these are interesting observations by Marshall, but in dialogue with each other they provide one kind of answer to the question of what John Muir meant by "Going to the mountains is going home." Reading, writing, talking, hiking are the life of Ian Marshall. Reconnected here, they are where he is at home, and in this work of narrative scholarship they are integrated to give insights into both the hiking life in the mountains and the literal home life to which he will return. They also provide another way of answering Rebecca Solnit's assumptions about Muir's escapism. Here nature writing, in the image of the snakes, for example, speaks to Marshall's personal disagreement and accommodation with a member of his hiking community, Marshall's reading and reflections on pioneer individualism and highlander community, together with his sense of the democratic trail culture and its dilemmas for the self-quest, plus his wider reflections on the inherent contradictions in "American values." But this is just a heavy-handed way of saying that the achievements of this narrative structure of juxtaposition work with the subtle reverberations of poetry in what is really a narrative about a hike. In Marshall's case narrative scholarship is not self-indulgent precisely because it is self-critically reflective and combative in its engagements with hikers, high environments, and highly regarded books. In a later book, *Peak Experiences* (2003), Marshall makes a more personal exploration of his need for nature through his walking and reading.

If Solnit's themes are concerned with landscape politics and Marshall's with different kinds of communities, Elder's and Mabey's works provide insights of a more deeply personal level for the writer's emotional and intellectual life. In the same year Marshall's book was published, John Elder, also a former chair of ASLE, produced the groundbreaking work *Reading the Mountains of Home*. Elder's book takes as its starting point Robert Frost's poem "Directive" and is rooted in Vermont where nature and culture, wildness and community, the densely wooded mountain and the individual hiker are "in contrast to the more polarized vision of the western wilder-

ness movement" (Elder 1998, 234). Elder finds that pondering the way his local maps show the integration of nature and culture "also helps to connect other pairs of terms we have too often separated, like science and poetry, hiking and reading." So this book describes a sequence of hikes through one year in the mountains around John Elder's hometown, Bristol, also the region where Frost's poem is located. As the hikes proceed from south to north, Elder reflects on successive lines of the poem.

On the first page of the book, Elder rejects critical theories that "assert that literature is no more than a self-referential web of words," contending himself that "Frost's poem both grows from and contributes to the landscape of Vermont." What makes this a moving and profound work of narrative scholarship is the way Elder uses engagements with both poem and place to help him understand a year of family losses and disorientation. "This was not the story I expected to write, but it turned out to be the one that my year brought, that the land accommodated, and that the poem helped me start to shape" (Elder 1998, 3). What is meant here by "accommodate" and by "start to shape"? Answering these questions will demonstrate what narrative criticism can do in the hands of another first-person writer/reader/hiker in a mountain environment. For here is another writer seeking to understand and mediate the lived dynamic of the feedback between nature and culture while walking through the Appalachian Mountains: "My goal has been to explore, in a direct and personal way, an ecosystem of meaning that includes both literature and landscape" (4).

Hiking out of his backyard, Elder is as concerned to mediate the mountain woods above his home as he is the poem "Directive," always with an inner eye to the unfolding tensions in his own life as they also demand reflection and insights from literature and landscape. "Both in reading 'Directive' and in hiking here, I have to slow down and take it step by step, and often have to turn aside from my anticipated line. Advancing through such a landscape, I meet the rocky particularity of a world below the eye's first easy, green impression" (Elder 1998, 17). Clearly, "accommodation" here is a two-way process between the land and the hiker, producing a deeply personal story that the poem helps to "shape" in this writing. As in much of Muir's writing, narrative becomes metaphor and metaphor intensifies the significance of narrative.

The climax, which follows the series of hikes that develop the book's insights into landscape, poem, and self, is not an experience of walking at all. A canoe trip in the waters of the mountain environment with which the book has been engaged arises naturally and, although it prevents the

"transect" of the pattern of hikes, as Elder puts it, this challenging journey in another medium of the landscape is a resonant conclusion to the agenda of the book's narrative. Elder mentions that the aim of through hikers on the Appalachian Trail is to approach Katahdin at the northern end by October and he, too, has an end point in mind. Through the winter he has been building a canoe named *Tribute* in memory of the father he lost just before beginning his project. At the same time, his son, Matthew, was going through a "dark phase of adolescence that cut off communication and left our family frightened and confused" (Elder 1998, 3). Instead of taking the canoe onto Bristol Pond to conclude his journey, as he had intended, Elder accepts a challenge from Matthew that they should go through the whitewater of Otter Creek Gorge in *Tribute*. The canoe is overwhelmed and sinks. The final chapter of the book tells this story, with all its many kinds of undercurrents, not least those of family tensions that are so recognizable. The fear and laughter of father and son are understood in relation to the final two lines of the Frost poem: "Here are your waters and your watering place. / Drink and be whole again beyond confusion." The skillful detail of Elder's critical attention to these lines actually means so much more to the reader of his book at this point and in this context than it possibly could as an isolated act of literary criticism.

Despite Elder's tendency to use quasi-religious language like "grace" and "faith" in a rather portentous and precious way in this book, the rigor and resistance to sentimentality of this final chapter produces a richness of paradoxes that resist comfortable resolution: "Those rapids also turned out to be our access to a larger flow. They kept me from completing the transect of my intention, tugging me back instead up the eddies of confusion and into a new adventure" (Elder 1998, 231). Elder's prose uses the actual metaphors from Frost's poem to understand his own experience within Frost's landscape. In this way "the land accommodates" his experience in a deep sense, while the poem "starts to shape" his understanding. The result is a poetic prose that is actually richer in meaning—because we know this is also about Elder's loss of his father and his confusion about his son—than could be achieved by conventional literary criticism: "As with 'again,' I hear in 'beyond' both a celebration of a fortunate arrival and a recognition that such a moment comes again and again, because most of the time we are *not* beyond confusion. . . . Only confusion makes possible a beyond. Only the cross-pollination of design and experience, loss and recovery, brings the new thing into view. It is always confusion that we drink" (233).

Clearly, Elder is admitting to his own confusion here, as a father of a

son going through a phase of confusion, but trying hard to hang in to the relationship. The purpose of Elder's book is not so much to critique the Frost text as to critique his own life through the medium of walking with the text as a guide to meditation in their shared landscape. The outcome of these interconnections is within him. When Michael Cohen characterizes John Elder's book as an example of "the praise-song school" of ecocritcism (Cohen 2004, 21)—uncritical, quasi-religious, and reaching for "a timeless harmony that seems to be beyond rational scrutiny"—he is thinking of narrative scholarship as a critique of a text alone, rather than of a life that includes text, landscape, and self. Narrative scholarship is relatively new and, indeed, Michael Cohen's book on the work of John Muir, *The Pathless Way*, was an early example of a first-person presence, caring about the same landscape, in intellectual dialogue with texts that were not always comfortable for the critic who explored that personal narrative of engagement. But, as I suggested in chapter 6, Cohen's reservations about narrative scholarship are really about the dangers of American nature writing, from which Elder's work has sprung with, in my view, new possibilities of reconnection.

John Elder's *Reading the Mountains of Home* charts his recovery from personal loss and family confusion through his taking the poem of Robert Frost outside for a walk over the ground that it was rooted in. Through this self-reflective, post-pastoral mode of retreat and return, something has been deeply understood, if not completely healed. Far from simpleminded escapism, this is what Muir knew could be achieved by an attentive and thoughtful engagement with the forces of nature at their most uplifted and uplifting. When he advised those who were "business-tangled" to get out for a month into the "care-killing" mountains and become "calm enough for discriminating observation," he did so in the half-joking belief that "it will lengthen [your life] and make you truly immortal" (Muir 1901; *W-D* 466). For the English naturalist and writer Richard Mabey the key to the healing effect of contact with nature was "being taken not out of myself but back *in*, of nature entering me, firing up the wild bits of my imagination" (Mabey 2005, 224).

In 1998 Mabey published a huge work of scholarship, *Flora Britannica*, which collected the folklore of plants found in Britain. Following the completion of *Flora Britannica* Mabey found that he did not have another book project thrusting to the surface and doubted, anyway, that he could write a book that could make such a contribution as the one he'd just finished. He fell into a depression that cut him off from the natural world. He left all letters unopened, stayed in bed, turned to face the wall, and (temporarily)

severed his relationship with his sister, who insisted that they sell the family home in the Cotswolds, where they still lived together. Therapy and even a spell in the modern institution in which John Clare spent his last years all failed. With debt collectors at the door and his money run out, Mabey was taken in by friends in Norfolk. *Nature Cure* (2005) is the story of the first year of his recovery, having moved from the woods of the Cotswolds to the wetlands of Norfolk, and from two isolating years of not writing a word, to keeping a diary for a new lover. Although the chapters are themed in a subtle way, charting his putting down roots ("Flitting," "Lair," "Commonplaces," etc.) and the seasons' revelations as he walks through his new habitat, they are broken into short sections that allow for the cross-fertilization of observations, narratives, and reflections: "Since my recovery, it's seemed absurd that, with our new understanding of the kindredness of life, so-called 'nature writing' should divorce itself from other kinds of literature, and from the rest of human existence" (Mabey 2005, 22).

A better definition of "narrative scholarship" could not be found, and it has emerged perfectly naturally from the need to tell this story in this way. It is in the imaginative reflections on the "scientific" observations made during this one year's walks that the personal insights discovered by Mabey are turned into instructive metaphors of rich resonance by his beguilingly simple, fresh prose. For Mabey, his life as a writer is inseparable from his life as a naturalist, reader, walker, and lover, all of which connect him to nature in their different ways and are, in fact, his nature. "Learning to write again was what finally made me better . . . and I believe that language and imagination, far from alienating us from nature, are our most powerful and natural tools for re-engaging with it. . . . Culture isn't the opposite or contrary of nature. It's the interface between us and the non-human world, our species' semi-permeable membrane" (Mabey 2005, 23).

Here Mabey articulates the premise of his book, which is also the premise of this book. In his work of narrative scholarship Mabey tests and revises common assumptions about our perceptions of nature and our part in it, including the usual dismissal of the importance of playfulness in creatures, the mysterious pull of the west on humans, and the clichés around his title. Mabey is both challenging and reconnecting in discoveries that demand a range of discourses from scientific observations and theories to the intimately personal. There are plenty of quotations from his English antecedents John Clare and Gilbert White (of whom Mabey is the biographer) woven into the search of this narrative, but in *Nature Cure* many of the ideas we have all been reading with Richard Mabey in Thoreau, Dillard,

Merchant, Meeker, Griffin, Snyder, Abram, and Edward O. Wilson have been brought into an engagement with Norfolk by a distinctively English voice feeling its way through distinctively English habitats and cultures. American readers will find it curious that Mabey feels the need to justify the personal mode of his narrative to readers "on this side of the Atlantic." In a telling sentence he reveals the divisions within British culture that inhibit the development of a narrative scholarship: "It's become customary, on this side of the Atlantic, stiffly to exclude all such personal narratives from writings about the natural world, as if experience of nature were something separate from real life, a diversion, a hobby; or perhaps only to be evaluated through the dispassionate and separating prism of science. It has never felt like that to me" (Mabey 2005, 22).

What is to be gained by the post-pastoral practice of narrative scholarship has, I hope, been hinted at in my discussion of the work of Solnit, Marshall, Elder, and Mabey. These books walk into narrative scholarship achieving a density of meaning through an integration of modes of knowing and their discourses. In their pastoral mode of retreat they seek to return with a book that addresses the issues of post-pastoral concern. The results are both personal and transferable, book based but grounded in their habitats, drawing on tradition but innovative in their interplay with those discourses. They emerge fresh from the frisson of the place where nature and culture meet within the individual writer researching with feet, thought, and feeling working together.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Teaching Post-Pastoral Poetry of Landscape

THE FUNDAMENTAL basis of narrative scholarship is that direct experience of a landscape, like walking through it, is mediated through reading and reflection. The examples discussed in chapter 7 concerned prose writers. Here I extend that discussion into a pedagogical challenge for the poet and ecocritic who is a teacher of the writing of poetry. For such a person the development of the notion of the post-pastoral as a tool for ecocriticism also becomes a challenge to the writer and to the teacher. If one's own writing tries to avoid the idealizing, nostalgic traps of the pastoral, so should one's teaching. If the post-pastoral provides a set of questions that one might expect good writing about the environment to address for the critic, these questions should become a challenge for the poet and an imperative for the teacher of poetry writing.

This chapter considers what a post-pastoral pedagogical practice might be for a university teacher of creative writing. It also offers one way of introducing an ecocritical element into university-level creative writing curriculum (as indicated in point 4 of appendix A). The major part of this chapter offers a detailed case study of a residential trip of four days for university students taking a third-level course exploring poetry and landscape. This course provides an introduction to ecocriticism through the notions of the cultural construction of nature with a focus on the pastoral mode in particular. Students are offered the theoretical challenge of the post-pastoral and after a good deal of reading, creative explorations of concepts are made through structured outdoor workshop exercises. In the spirit of John Muir's integration of modes of learning and being, this chapter offers models to be adapted by writers and teachers of writing. It also offers to ecocritics ways of extending their critical tools through creativity, since, looking back on the ways I have been developing my own thinking about landscape through writing poetry, I can propose twenty-five different modes of poetry writing that might also be tested as a tool for ecocriticism.

I have been running this field course for fifteen years and obviously each time things happen differently. The weather forces creativity in new directions; the ideas of colleagues who have shared the trip have made new contributions; contacts made outside the trip with local artists and writers have provided opportunities for interviews and studio visits; ideas for new exercises have come from reading other poets and from new developments in my own creative work. What follows are two versions of a field course. The first is a generic model that summarizes my intentions for the trip and some of the variations that have occurred. The second, by Samantha Fryer, is a student's record of a trip that I asked her to write for inclusion in an article about the Poetry and Landscape field course (Gifford 1995b).

Four Days in Grasmere's Butterlip How Youth Hostel

(1) *Preparation*

Two course lectures before the trip have introduced the notion of the social construction of landscape (Gifford 1995a, 1–25). In the first of these I begin with a discussion of Edward Thomas's poem "Bob's Lane" (sometimes known as "Women He Liked"). In this poem Thomas presents an ironic scenario: because he loved trees, Bob planted them beside a lane that gradually turned it into an unpopular muddy "slough." It seems to me that at the end of the poem Thomas is asking readers a question that is unresolved by the poem: are the trees to be valued more than the abandoned lane? Small group discussion of this question leads into a lecture on the difference between an anthropocentric and an ecocentric view of this place and the notion that language always constructs place with a certain social connotation. The term *ecocentric* is simply another form of cultural construction. This is not to imply that physical nature is a cultural invention, only that language that refers to it inevitably is, including, of course, the word *nature*, which means different things in different social and cultural contexts.

So, armed with these concepts, the second lecture turns to consider Wordsworth's *Home at Grasmere* and *The Prelude*, books I and II. The first is interesting for the number of different constructions of the community Wordsworth makes on a continuum from the idyllic to the anti-idyllic. Students are asked to chart page numbers on a line of the continuum idyllic/anti-idyllic as a basis for group discussion. Also of central importance is the notion that the human mind itself is a part of nature and therefore designed to help us find our connectedness with our environment if only we can use it rightly. Indeed, Wordsworth puts his own mind to this purpose in

writing the early books of *The Prelude*, which ignore the excellent schooling Wordsworth received at Hawkshead Grammar School (which we visit) and presents instead a model of nature "ministering" to a receptive young mind and wild young body. Examples of nature as "minister" in books I and II of *The Prelude* have been brought by students to the lecture, and the range of these, from the moral to the animal, are discussed in terms of the poetic modes of constructing the landscape and its effects.

A journal will be required to be submitted two weeks after the trip. Its form is appropriately undefined, but it could contain photographs, drawings, and documentary material. It must, however, contain at least two types of material. Required are the poetry from the trip and reflections on two themes: the cultural construction of the Lake District ("Am I / To see the Lake District then, / Another bourgeois invention like the piano?" wrote W. H. Auden) and the cultural construction of Wordsworth historic sites.

When payment (subsidized by the department) has been received, the equipment list distributed, and I have completed that essential prior creative writing that is called "The Risk Assessment," two minibuses are filled with the somnambulant students, who will emerge as poets at the end of a three-hour journey.

(2) *The Program*

MONDAY

Leave Bretton Hall Campus 9:30 a.m. Arrive Grasmere 12:30.

Two groups walk in opposite directions round the lake taking in Dove Cottage (and the Wordsworth Museum) and Rydal Mount. Notebooks are in use collecting observations that will later contribute to the two aspects of the journal. In the evening I give a lecture on pastoral and anti-pastoral traditions, introducing the challenge to the contemporary poet of the post-pastoral. (Sometimes this has begun as a slide lecture by my colleague from art history, the Turner scholar, Professor David Hill.)

TUESDAY

Writing workshops are conducted in four successive locations through the day that are described in detail by Samantha Fryer below. Some of the forms and teaching techniques described here are also used at a different level with school students in chapter 4.

1. Thirlmere. Here I point out that this apparently wild lake surrounded by trees is a man-made landscape constructed to provide drinking

water for Manchester. A glacier has carved the valley from a stream on the side of the original volcano at the center of what we construct as the "Lake District," so this land was forged by fire and shaped by ice. Students make descriptive notes on the evidence in front of them of these processes. These notes form the basis of a poem about processes in a landscape. In a class that has a wider scope, Writing and Environment, I invite students to take notes from this same viewpoint, focusing first on information I give about the history of this landscape. At a prearranged cue a student leaves the group and pushes me to the ground, stopping my increasingly manic flow of information. I suggest a TV script that begins as a serious documentary that is bizarrely interrupted and becomes a comic sketch in the Monty Python mode. But it must also raise some questions about popular assumptions about this landscape.

2. Castlerigg Stone Circle. This is a magic and mysterious place. I suggest that it is the setting for a stage in a relationship and guide notes toward making evocation of place suggest the appropriate emotions within the relationship in the final poem. For the Writing and Environment class I suggest a short radio script with a specific structure. This was originally necessitated by foot and mouth restrictions giving us only a view over the wall: He and She have not met before (of course, this could be He and He, or She and She) and find themselves staring at the stones from the entrance gate. They strike up a conversation about the stones. At first She chats Him up, then backs off as He, reticent at first, begins to chat Her up. An interruption leads to an ending.
3. Halfway up the path to Castle Rock of Triermain, Thirlspot. Here I quote John Muir: "When we try to pick out anything by itself, we find it hitched to everything else in the universe" (Muir 1911; *W-D* 248). The subject of the students' notes is focused on the way every single thing in front of us is connected to another thing, sometimes with connections that are invisible, the cloud to a blade of grass, for example. These notes are then structured into an amulet poem.
4. The summit of Castle Rock. The short steep final ascent on wet grass and scree to this rock that is close to the road often induces charged emotions in the students that I channel into their notes immediately. Here I suggest notes toward a monologue poem based on someone arriving here with an anxiety, taking in the summit view, and finding a resolution that will lead to some change upon return.

In the evening of this second day I give a poetry reading of a selection from a list of twenty-five kinds of landscape poem that I have attempted myself. Four of these have already been begun by the students during the day's workshops, and others may be the subject of forthcoming workshops. The challenge to students is to expand and refine the list by writing their own poems that go further than mine. This is, of course, also a challenge to their reading. I reproduce in appendix B the handout I offer.

WEDNESDAY

The day begins with a workshop inside the mountain in Gillerthwaite Cathedral Cave, producing a poem of type 5, appendix B. Or, if the wet weather option is needed, the students make a poem from the place names on Lake District maps (see type 6, appendix B), or, if going out into the rain is preferred, a workshop is held on ten stations (moments of observation and meditation) on a walk (see type 7, appendix B). The latter has been undertaken in drenching conditions that required the forms of warmth offered by a pub at lunchtime. In the afternoon we visit Hawkshead and write in the grammar school, sitting at desks, one of which is Wordsworth's initialed desk. The evening deadline for a reading of a work in progress tends to focus the writing here.

At some point in the trip I fit in a visit to what always turns out to be a site of debate about the pastoral. At the bottom of the lane below the youth hostel is a famous source of constructions of the Lake District that many visitors have in their homes. The Heaton Cooper Studio in Grasmere sells prints and originals from three generations of local landscape painters. Reactions to the images here provide lively discussion for poets trying to avoid idealization but wanting a celebration such as these painters seek in their different styles. On the final evening we have a reading of students' writing that always produces surprises at what has been achieved.

THURSDAY

It's time to confront leaving and to reflect on what Wordsworthian "ministrations" have taken place, together with what has been missed at home and what will be missed from here when back home. A poem might come from such thoughts during a walk on Loughrigg Terrace (see type 9, appendix B). Finally I try to arrange a visit either to the crucible of an artist's studio (local artists Donald Wilkinson and Julian Cooper have been kind enough to offer us studio visits) or to an art gallery in Kendal, or the unlikely venue of the Kendal Courthouse, where Julian's landscape paintings

were commissioned by the architect to serve a certain social function that is interesting to observe (see type 8, appendix B).

We return to Bretton Hall Campus by 4 p.m.

The Student Experience

The Lake District Poetry Workshops
(A true story)
by Samantha Fryer

"So Sam, what are you doing next week?"
"I'm going to spend a few days in the Lake District sitting in caves writing poetry. (When the inspiration comes of course!)"
"Oh, right."

Well, perhaps I was a little limited in my preconceptions of the field trip. But I really had no idea about these writing workshops, what was expected of me, and what I could actually achieve. To ensure that nobody else is left in the dark, I have been commissioned (at great cost, I might add) to write a small piece about what really went on.

The first day at Grasmere did not contain any actual writing workshops. But while walking round the lake Terry Gifford did point out several interesting features in the landscape. For example, tree roots that looked like hands clawing at the ground. He wanted us to start to appreciate what we saw as poets, not as tourists. We began to note interesting ideas and features in our notebooks, which we had to carry at all times.

After an evening lecture about pastoral poetry and the dangers of falling into that style, as an unsuspecting would-be poet might, we felt ready to start the workshops on Tuesday.

The first workshop took place beside Thirlmere Lake. Terry began with a talk about the physical formation of the valley and the landscape in front of us, first by nature and second by humans. He talked about the elements of fire (volcanic rock), earth (soil formation), ice (glaciation), water (reservoir for Manchester), and air (trees breathing), all contained in the landscape, which was being constantly changed by humans for our needs. Then the writing began. We had to pick out five features in the valley and put an adjective in front of each describing color, texture, movement, sound, or shape. Then we turned each line into a simile by comparing it with something using the word *like* and including an active verb. For example, "Pointed trees like fingers reach to the sky."

After this exercise we were given about half an hour composition time when we worked on the information Terry had given us and on our notebook sentences with similes. The poem was supposed to be about "landscape as process." He didn't expect a first draft in that time, but wanted us to play around with some ideas and see what we could create. The workshop had started off many trains of thought, and I found it hard to construct them into any form of poem at that time. It was not until later, after ideas had been brewing for a while, that I actually managed to write my Thirlmere poem.

The next workshop took place at Castlerigg Stone Circle. There was no information given to us about the circle or the landscape—unless we asked. Instead we went among the stones, touched them, looked at the surrounding features, and wrote a "landscape as location" poem. This was to be about two people who visited the circle at a certain point in their relationship. How they were feeling should be apparent from the descriptions of what they were seeing. I thought about the circle of stones, the circle of hills surrounding them, and the large cycle of life surrounding and embracing us all. This sparked off the idea for my poem, which was about a relationship that was going round in circles, not achieving anything. I did feel part of a large cycle up there and, with the ideas from the first workshop still fresh in my mind, I found this one of the easiest poems to write.

The next workshop took place halfway up a mountain—Castle Rock. Terry talked about everything in nature being linked to everything else, as in the water cycle, for example. He then told us about the amulet form of poem, written inside bracelets by the Vikings as a love charm. These were about eight lines long, with the first line the same as the last, and the beginning of each new line the same as the end of the last line. We had to write a "landscape as linkage" poem on an ecological theme. This I found very difficult. Terry does this kind of workshop with children and I bet they love it. My mother certainly liked the idea of using it with her class of ten-year-olds. However, everything I wrote sounded very basic, or just like I was ten myself and trying to use big words. I listened to one of the other girl's amulets and it was really good. So it was possible, but I just could not find the right ideas—until much later.

On the summit of Castle Rock we had the next workshop. We were all a little shaken at this point, due to some slippery grass on the last bit of the climb, and found it hard to express any emotions except fear, or some jubilation at having reached the top alive. Terry explained that summits have a reputation for being a place where people go to sort out their thoughts and problems. (It's the clear mountain air!) We had to think about a "landscape as mirror" poem, in which someone climbed the mountain and described

their anxiety mirrored in the landscape viewed from the top. I found it a little hard to think because of the frame of mind I was in. But the first part of my poem was composed on the summit and I think reflects my own thoughts as I tackled the climb. Later on I finished the poem by using little bits of the perceptions I made on the summit. Now it's my favorite of the poems I wrote that week.

Those were all the workshops of our first full day. Four workshops in different places, including the top of a small mountain, were a very intense and tiring experience. I don't think that my brain and my body have been taxed so much before. At the end of the day I had to wonder if the muscle of my brain had grown as much as those of my legs and I would need a bigger hat!

The next day we had our last writing workshop. This took place inside a mountain. We walked through tunnels in complete blackness with one hand on the shoulder of the person in front. Then, at a certain point, Terry lit a candle and showed us that we were in a large cavern. It was beautiful. Candles were lit and people perched on bits of rock, which had been sat on by the miners years before, and wrote. It was really peaceful until a couple of executives on a training course ran in to search for a clue. It broke the peace, but emphasized the diverse use of the landscape. They were certainly very surprised to see fifteen people writing quietly by candlelight in the heart of this mountain. I really enjoyed this day—there was so much to comment on, to see, and to compare. I think that this will be one memory that I will hold for a long time.

The rest of the day and the next were spent drafting and redrafting poems. We had a poetry reading in the evening where everyone read out one poem and then the rest commented on what they liked, or what worked well in that poem. This was very useful and not damaging to the fragile egos of the new poets as nothing bad was said, only constructive comments.

I had a very intense few days in the Lake District and I thoroughly enjoyed every minute. I wouldn't have written five poems just by sitting down and saying "I'm going to write a poem." I hadn't written much poetry before, but the workshops really did channel and guide my thoughts. If nothing else, this field trip helped me to start looking at landscapes as more than just a pretty view.

Amulet

Dark trees cast off their dead leaves
Dead leaves suffuse the rich earth

The rich earth is washed away by gurgling streams
Gurgling streams run past dirty factories
Dirty factories belch out fatal sulfur dioxide
Fatal sulfur dioxide acidifies the water droplets
Water droplets condense to form cooling rain
Cooling rain falls on the dark trees
The dark trees cast off their dead leaves.

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CHAPTER NINE

Tests of Character in *Cold Mountain*

When, as mentioned in chapter 5, John Muir wrote in 1873 thanking the Oakland schoolmaster John McChesney for the gift of the works of John Ruskin, he must have known that he had in his hands books that would inform his reading of all other books henceforth (Badè 1924; *LL* 186). Indeed, as I have shown in chapter 5, Muir went on to read Ruskin's works at least three times, and the edition had not then been published in which he made the detailed endpaper notes in the books found in his library. Muir took from his mode of reading Ruskin more than information that could be called up for later reference. He absorbed style and distanced himself, in 1873, from what he thought of as Ruskin's ideas. Later he went on to index Ruskin's ideas for the development of his own thinking and writing in the same way he did for most of the other books he read, of whatever kind. In the writing about our reading that we call "literary criticism" there has grown up, since the rise of "theory," a convention that one brings the reading of a particular kind of book that is characterized as theoretical to bear on the reading of an imaginative text. In this way critics declare and make transparent their approach to the text. So most literary critics searching for a way to articulate a reading of the novel *Cold Mountain* (1997) would feel the need to anchor their reading of the novel in the ideas of one or more theorists, whose work they can qualify and refine while using it as a frame through which to approach the novel. If one is seeking to challenge classifications and to break down the boundaries between different forms of knowledge, it ought to be possible to find a framework for the reading and the discussion of a novel through the concepts taken from a book quite different from a work of literary theory. In this spirit narrative scholarship offers one alternative approach.

John Tallmadge, in his important essay in *ISLE*, "Toward a Natural History of Reading," seeks to unify "erudition and engagement" (Tallmadge 2000, 38) to explain the "disciplined subjectivity" linking the natural feedbacks of our reading, our experience, and our writing—that is to say, our thinking about land, our sensuous apprehension of land, and our expres-

sion of our reading about land as ecocritics. This is Tallmadge's form of narrative scholarship (35). In an exploration of a subjective natural history of the "erudition" aspect of Tallmadge's thesis, I'd like to briefly explain how my response to *Cold Mountain* has been dominated not by the concepts of a literary theorist but by the narrative scholarship of the mountaineer and scholar Pete Sinclair. The link has an intellectual justification, as I show below, but it also has a "natural history," which is an illustration of what Gary Snyder calls "the gift-exchange" of our cultural ecology (Snyder 1990, 19), which, in turn, reminded me of Muir's letter of thanks for McChesney's gift of the volumes of Ruskin.

I had invited Pete Sinclair, now Emeritus Professor at Evergreen State College, Olympia, Washington, to fly halfway around the world from his home on the southern shores of Puget Sound to speak at the Eleventh International Festival of Mountaineering Literature at Bretton Hall, University of Leeds, in 1997 (http://www.festivalofmountaineeringliterature.co.uk). At the Seattle airport he bought a copy of the recently published *Cold Mountain* and, having read it on the plane, he gave me this first edition when he arrived. At the festival he read from his forthcoming book, *Thinking Out Loud through the American West* (1999). Pete grew up an easterner, and this book is his idiosyncratic way of asking what might be our right relationship with wilderness in the West. He tells a number of personal narratives of his physical and intellectual engagements with the West since moving to Jackson Hole in 1959, before becoming head of the Grand Teton Rescue Service and then teaching interdisciplinary literature and environment courses at Evergreen.

Cold Mountain is rooted in Charles Frazier's detailed family knowledge of the mountains of North Carolina. (This is a landscape I got to know while writer-in-residence at Lenoir-Rhyne College, Hickory, North Carolina, in the spring of 1997, the year *Cold Mountain* was published). It seems to me that the search of both Sinclair and Frazier, through their very different narratives of quest (one nonfiction, the other fiction), is to find a way of learning to live in a landscape that is both directly teaching, to the attuned ear and mind, and is at the same time culturally constructed, both by that accumulated learning itself and by alienating aspects of culture. The very business of survival in a landscape identifies, for both writers, the difference between connecting and alienating attitudes toward land. For Frazier, as for Sinclair, this quickly comes down to a matter of personal integrity. That is, both books explore the subtle matter that Ruskin called, in *Modern Painters*, "The Moral of Landscape" (Ruskin 1903, 5:420). I use Pete Sinclair's book to

indicate why a historical novel, so grounded in the particulars of place and time, became so crucially popular for us now, on both sides of the Atlantic.

It is worth remembering that the purchase made by Pete Sinclair at the Seattle airport is now a rare first edition because the novel has become a best seller in both the United States and the United Kingdom. Both books, Frazier's rooted in the rural East and Sinclair's in the wildernesses of the West, are bought by a readership that must be largely urban. Furthermore, Sinclair was, directly and indirectly, bringing both books about American landscapes to this British reader. So what was going on here? The answer lies, once again, in the *Idylls* of Theocritus from the third century B.C. What was going on here, on an international scale, is another enactment of the pastoral, the literary mode of which the *Idylls* is the first example: rural retreat delivering insights for an urban audience upon return. To the extent that Sinclair's and Frazier's books avoid the idealization of the *Idylls* and are informed by a modern environmental knowingness, I would want to define them as post-pastoral texts, by the criteria outlined in chapter 2.

One chapter of Sinclair's book is titled "Terrain, Character, and Text" (Sinclair 1999, 28). In it he tells the story of his accompanying a group of former students on their trips searching for a gun that was abandoned on the east side of the Sierras in California by an exploration party in 1844. Sinclair's student group never found the gun, but the point of the story of the search is that Sinclair regards it as a personal test of his ability not only to read the terrain well enough to be able to locate the most likely place to abandon a heavy gun but to read the terrain through the temperament and character of the nineteenth-century travelers. Thus, the nature of his search becomes a test of his own character. Can Sinclair judge at which particular rise in the ground, deterioration of the conditions underfoot, or thickening of the vegetation in 1844 that the mixture of pride and practicalities in this particular party of men would lead to the decision to abandon the gun?

Sinclair is reading the actual terrain on foot, but also through the prism of texts—the journal of the expedition and his research into correspondence about the unusual circumstances of the acquisition of the gun. The psychology behind the reason for taking the gun has to be factored into Sinclair's feel for the actual conditions of the land in the late nineteenth century in order to find the point of despair that led to abandonment by the gun carriers. His sensuous apprehension of terrain is complicated by the information and judgments derived from his scholarship.

This might seem to be a minor matter of historical research that requires no modern environmental knowingness. On the basis of this chapter alone

one might say that Sinclair's book is *not* a post-pastoral text. But the seriousness with which he considers this quest as a personal test of his own landscape judgment and his judgment of character and the way these two things are integrated hint at the significance of this chapter in the larger project of *Thinking Out Loud through the American West*. Sinclair is using the method of narrative scholarship in this book. He believes that his personal anecdotal narratives, built from his own journals, can act as symbolic stories that accumulate insights from which can be deduced some principles of "right behavior" for our species in the contemporary ecological dilemmas of the American West. One of his final, radical conclusions is that there are some parts of the West into which we should all, without exception, agree not to go. His concern to find a morally acceptable relationship between people and land in the West that avoids the pastoral idylls of much American nature writing determines that his book must be described as a post-pastoral text. So how might Pete Sinclair's mixture of the notions of terrain and character aid an understanding of this remarkable first novel by Charles Frazier, *Cold Mountain*?

The novel is set toward the end of the Civil War and opens with Inman, still recovering from a horrendous neck wound, leaving a hospital to make his way back to Cold Mountain, where, in the years before the war, he had made an informal engagement with Ada Munroe, the preacher's daughter. Chapters alternate between Inman's journey and Ada's parallel fight for survival after the death of her father, who had "kept her a child," as she later realized with resentment (23), by giving her skills only in the arts so that she does not know the simplest practical skills for living on a small farm alone. She is starving to death until joined by Ruby, from whom she undertakes an education in how to live from her land.

The learning for both of them has a moral resonance. When Inman says, "This journey will be the axle of my life" (Frasier 1997, 55; further unattributed page references in this chapter are to *Cold Mountain*), he is not just speaking of survival. It is striking that after the first series of encounters in his journey, which he thinks of as his first tests, he reflects on "how he might have done things differently in each case. He wished not to be smirched with the mess of other people" (95). Ada, smirched with the mess of her own upbringing as one who would apparently always be waited on, has to learn from Ruby's knowledge "how to do things right" with her land. Inman's journey takes him closer to a sense of "doing things right" in living from and surviving in the landscape. And for both Ada and Inman the landscape is peopled by those with destructive or creative ways of living in it:

the murderers and the healers. At the age of sixteen Inman had learned from his Cherokee friend Swimmer "signs and wonders" (16) of the living spirit of the natural world. What Ada learns from Ruby are natural signs for planting and pig killing, which she realizes are "an expression of stewardship, a means of taking care, a discipline. They provided a ritual of concern for the patterns and tendencies of the material world where it might be seen to intersect with some other world" (104). Her father would have dismissed such ideas as superstition. When he arrived among the white backcountry folk of the Blue Ridge Mountains, "Munroe found no evidence of religion other than a worship of animals and trees and rocks and weather" (44), which he thinks of as remnants of the "old relic Celt" in the original pioneers. Ada discovers that the animals and crops in her cove below Cold Mountain need "the things [she] was learning to do" (113), just as she needs to learn from them. Even Inman is still learning profoundly from landscape on his journey: "The creek's turnings marked how all that moves must shape itself to the maze of actual landscape, no matter what its preferences might be" (121). This modification of Inman's "airy" notion "that gravity in its ideal form was supposed to work in straight lines," is not just a symbolic insight for his journey, but for his very survival.

Inman is not only in danger from passing groups of Federals, but is being hunted as an "outlier"—a draft dodger lying out in the backwoods—by Teague and his group of the Home Guard. The dehumanized ruthlessness that Inman experiences during his covert journey comes as no surprise to him after his experiences on the battlefields of the war and of the battle at Fredericksburg in particular. Combined with the physical deprivations of traveling by night and away from major roads, the bleak focus on survival throughout the book echoes the work of Cormac McCarthy. There is even a similar biblical and often anachronistic tone to the narration. Four ways in which *Cold Mountain* differs from McCarthy's work are illuminating, however. I have already referred to two of them: Inman's learning from landscape and his attempts to maintain a fundamental integrity, despite the need to also be ruthless at times. But two other features of Frazier's book are distinctive. First there is the evidence that a tough humanity is possible in this tough mountain environment, and the second is the role of a text Inman carries with him, a rolled-up third part of Bartram's *Travels*. McCarthy wants to treat ironically the bleakness and toughness that actually fascinates him. As I have pointed out elsewhere, Billy Parham is crying at the end of *The Crossing* (1994) because following his father's code of revenge has led to not only the death of his brother but the realization that this macho mode

has reduced his ability to adopt a caring role for his brother (Gifford 1999a, 158). The ironic implication is that an ability to draw more on the feminine side of themselves would actually make these cowboys less vulnerable in their ultimate survival. But this is too tentative and too late in McCarthy's novel because his interest is really in exploring the macho activity of his narrative and creating a morbid bleakness of tone.

Inman, on the other hand, meets occasional kindnesses, which reflect his own occasional opportunities for generosity, and in the goat woman he meets a profoundly symbolic figure of landscape-based healing qualities, a "root doctor" who makes medicines from plants. This emphasis on the healing potential in the land runs throughout the book, counterpointing its brutalities. Ada has learned from Ruby that "cures of all sorts exist in the natural world. Its every nook and cranny apparently lay filled with physic and restorative to bind up rents from the outside" (333). Ruby "worried that people were proving themselves not worthy of healing and that goldenseal had departed in disgust" (304). Late in the book Ada's "work of burying and healing" one day is sustained by the knowledge she has painstakingly gained below Cold Mountain: "To live fully in a place all your life, you kept aiming smaller and smaller in attention to detail" (307). In the depths of despair Inman had "tried to walk with no hope and no fear but had failed miserably, for he had done both. But on the best days of walking he achieved some success in matching his thoughts to the weather, dark or bright, so as to attune with what freak of God's mind sent cloud or shine" (343). This attuning to place in North Carolina takes forms that range beyond folk medicine from the pragmatic (a bark cabin, a rope bed, a crafted broom) to the arts of quilting, in which Inman sees his fortune, and of music: "Stobrod's fingers on the fiddle neck found patterns that seemed set firm as the laws of nature" (290).

Now this analysis might seem in danger of tipping the book into Leo Marx's category of "sentimental pastoral" (Marx 1964, 5–11) and, indeed, pastoral idylls do appear occasionally in the book. But Frazier himself hints at this danger to the reader. From time to time Inman quotes from his copy of Bartram, whose aesthetic vision and lyrical prose are straight out of the European tradition of pastoral. Frazier uses Bartram to distance his own writing about nature from the pastoral. Inman is not himself traveling through, consuming landscape to make literature as Bartram was; he is scrabbling through dirt, slopes, and trees for survival. When Inman finally meets Ada he quotes to her a passage from Bartram, and as he reads he realizes that the language is so sensuous that "all it seemed to be about was sex" (330). After-

ward he and Ada imagine living together in a North Carolina idyll: "They would do as they pleased and run their lives by the roll of the seasons" (344). But whenever Frazier evokes pastoral it is undercut, complicated by a counter representation.

Four pages from the end we are shown a series of simple acts in three sentences: a boy's hand moves fast, Inman "suddenly lay on the ground," and the boy looks at his gun saying, "They God." Ada hears the shot, runs to find Inman, and, Frazier writes, "an observer up on the brow of the ridge would have looked down on a still, distant tableau in the winter woods. . . . A pair of lovers. The man reclined with his head in the woman's lap" (353). The reader does not know for sure that Inman is actually dying. Indeed, it is not really clear that he has been shot. I know of no reader who has not had to reread those crucial three sentences immediately on first reading. This apparently pastoral tableau is actually an image of "et in Arcadia ego": even at the Arcadian narrative climax of the coming together of Inman and Ada, death is present—arbitrary, unexpected, and ultimately unavoidable. Poussin's famous painting *The Arcadian Shepherds*, in which this Latin inscription is best known, is a landmark of the post-pastoral in art: another recognition of "the elemental power-circuit of the universe" (Hughes 1971, 9).

The two page epilogue, set many years later, suggests that Ada had a child from her one night of final union with Inman and that Ruby has had children with the Georgia boy found in an outlier's cave and taken on by Stobrod and Pangle. The last page leaves us with images of a creative domestic evening: the children dancing, a new fiddle tune from Stobrod, classical storytelling from Ada, and a poultice from Ruby. These are narrative icons of cultural continuity located in the Blue Ridge Mountains. But Ada's story is of Philemon and Baucis, peasant lovers who die together and become intertwined oak and linden trees. The undercurrent counters to the pastoral in this narrative's turn of events complicate for the reader the evident possibility of Arcadian happiness in this evening in Ada and Ruby's cove below Cold Mountain. In this way Frazier's novel makes its remarkably resonant ending. Here is an unconventional family unit that has come together out of a traumatic narrative. For the reader this must qualify the apparent idyll of their making music, dance, story, and healing. Their resilience, their mountain people's ability to make healing tunes out of hardship, is what is being celebrated here in a scene that is situated as post-pastoral within the context of the novel, even as the pastoral is seductively present within it. The lovers of Frazier's narrative have not died together intertwined by nature, as Ada knows even as she educates the next gener-

ation in the pastoral tradition that perpetuates such myths in the story of Philemon and Baucis.

What I have demonstrated in this reading of *Cold Mountain* is that the text raises the six questions for the reader that I have characterized as "post-pastoral" in chapter 2: Ada's learned humility in living with the processes of "burying and healing" leads to her inner nature learning directly from outer nature, which is ultimately, as it is for Inman and Ruby, a survival based on the merging of culture and nature. In this state of living, "doing things right" is learned from reading the land as traveler or farmer so that the exploitation of people in the war becomes a metaphor for an unsustainable way of living on the land. The narrative technique of alternating between traveling and farming endorses Frazier's interest in people and in land and their capacity to live together.

In an interview for BBC radio, Frazier said, "Part of writing the book was trying to understand why people like my ancestors, who were subsistence farmers, went off and fought that war and what it did to them to go fight a bad war for a bad cause" (Frazier 2000). Frazier also revealed that in order to learn how to end the book he had to revisit the landscape where his ancestor, on whom Inman's story is based, was actually shot in the last days of the war:

> I finally went back up to that area where these events happened and I went to the place where the actual Inman had a gunfight with the Home Guard. I walked around. I spent a whole day wandering around just thinking, "How am I going to end this book?" and suddenly it seemed very clear that I had taken this man's short and very difficult life, had given him all kinds of experiences he probably never had, but that I owed it to him to keep his ending in some form that was fairly close to what really happened to him.

Frazier himself, then, had finally to learn how to make an ethical decision from the direct experience of an actual place. It is a process John Muir began thinking through in *A Thousand Mile Walk to the Gulf* and that is currently reflected in the practice of narrative scholarship. Like Muir, and more recently like Pete Sinclair, Charles Frazier has produced a text that asks us to confront some character-testing lessons located in a landscape that demands "doing things right" in all its subtle senses, where post-pastoral readings of landscape render ecology and ethics inseparable.

CHAPTER TEN

Muir's Fourfold Concept of the Mountaineer

"I AM hopelessly and forever a mountaineer," John Muir wrote to Jeanne Carr from Yosemite Valley in October 1874. "I expected to have been among the foothill drift long ago," he wrote, "but the mountains fairly seized me" (Badè 1924; *LL* 207). Muir always referred to himself as "a mountaineer," but what he meant by this is more complex than our modern use of the term. In fact, his fourfold concept of what should be required to be called "a mountaineer" provides another example of his holistic sense of his being at home in the mountains. Something of that complexity is hinted at in this letter as his enthusiasm moves from the personal, to the scientific and to the social: "Had a glorious storm. . . . I camped four nights at [Merced Lake]. . . . was in a kind of calm incurable ecstasy. . . . I found out a noble truth concerning the Merced moraines that escaped me hitherto. . . . I care to live only to entice people to look at Nature's loveliness."

Certainly he was possessed by the basic impulse of a mountaineer in the primary sense—the compulsion to attain a summit, often leaving his companions and himself suffering crippling frostbite and starvation to do so, often drawn upward against his better judgment: "We little know until tried how much of the uncontrollable there is in us, urging across glaciers and torrents, and up dangerous heights, let the judgement forbid as it may" (Muir 1894; *W-D* 321). Sometimes the gap between debilitating privation and the energy needs of technical climbing must have been closer than he admitted: "For two and a half days I had nothing in the way of food, yet suffered nothing and was finely nerved for the most delicate work of mountaineering both among crevasses and lava cliffs" (Badè 1924; *LL* 211).

In his assessment of Muir the mountaineer in the *Alpine Journal* (vol. 99, 1994, reprinted in *LL* 898–907), Sir Edward Peck refers to Muir's vivid account of his solo first ascent of Mount Ritter, which, says Peck, "belongs to the finest tradition of mountaineering literature," but Peck makes no mention of Muir's first ascent of Cathedral Peak on 7 September 1873 ("It has

more individual character than any other rock or mountain I ever saw, excepting perhaps the Yosemite South Dome [Half Dome]" [Badè 1924; *LL* 268]). Muir was obsessed by Cathedral Peak when he first passed it on 14 August ("I never weary gazing at the wonderful Cathedral") and it is typical of his desire for a summit that he climbed it on the way back through Tuolumne Meadows a few weeks later. But he wrote nothing of the climb itself, on which, incidentally, I believe he could not have avoided using a hand jam if he did indeed climb "up to its topmost spire, which I reached at noon" (Muir 1911; *W-D* 281).

David Mazel, in his survey of early American mountaineering writing, asserts that "Muir was the most skilled American climber of his day" (Mazel 1991, 233). Speaking as a modern climber Mazel goes on to say that "many of his routes are steep and exposed enough that those following in his footsteps have been glad of a rope, yet Muir climbed them alone." So while the Scottish-born John Muir was one of the most technically accomplished solo mountaineers practicing in North America in the late nineteenth century, the term *mountaineer* as he used it of himself included at least three aspects other than the first sense of the word referring to the attainment of summits, some of which were also common to other American and European Victorian alpinists.

In the second aspect of the term as he used it, he was a scientist, making observations about plant ecology, carrying instruments for recording heights and pressures, discovering living glaciers and their effects for the first time in Yosemite, observing talus formation from earthquake-induced rockfall, and noting the dynamics of weather changes by seeking to be at the center of mountain storms. In his library late in his life was a collection of mountaineering books that included Whymper's *Scrambles amongst the Alps*, Norman Collie's *Climbing on the Himalaya and Other Mountain Ranges*, Sir Martin Conway's *The Bolivian Andes*, and Hudson Stuck's *The Ascent of Denali*. But most often mentioned in his letters are the works of John Tyndall, who must have provided a model for Muir of the mountaineering scientist. In September 1871 he refers to his having been sent "Tyndall's new book," which must have been *Hours of Exercise in the Alps*, published in London in that year (Gisel 2001, 149). By 10 December 1872 he tells his Oakland friend John McChesney that he as read it (Badè 1924; *LL* 182). In seeking to become stormbound on Mount Shasta (14,162 feet / 4,317 meters) in November 1874, Muir had an agenda that defined his (and Tyndall's) kind of mountaineering: "I am the more eager to ascend to study the mechanical condi-

tions of the fresh snow at so great an elevation; also to obtain clear views of the comparative quantities of lava inundation northward and southward; also general views of the channels of the ancient Shasta glaciers, and many other lesser problems besides—the fountains of the rivers here, and the living glaciers" (Badè 1924; *LL* 209). In fact, the essay that Muir made out of this ascent and another ascent the following year, "A Perilous Night on Shasta's Summit" (Muir 1918; *LL* 891–900), is more unintentionally amusing for the fact that during the five days that Muir was causing alarm for those below by being holed up "like a squirrel in a warm, fluffy nest . . . wishing only to be let alone," so much anxiety built up below the snowline that he was eventually "rescued." Muir wrote: "Busied myself with my notebook, watching the gestures of the trees in taking the snow, examining separate crystals under a lens, and learning the methods of their deposition as an enduring fountain for the streams" (Muir 1918; *W-D* 894). Muir suspected that the interruption to his observations was as much out of concern by the outfitter to recover his camp furniture as for Muir himself.

Muir's resilience and resourcefulness in his drifted-over bivouac ("the passionate roar produced a glad excitement") exemplifies the third sense in which he regarded himself as a "mountaineer." It is the sense in which he also refers to the birds, animals, and plants of the highest regions as "noble mountaineers." This is the ability not just to survive but to be at home in the mountains, finding in the "passionate roar" of the week-long snowstorm "a glad excitement." Arising from this is a deeper sense in which Muir's very being is sustained by his need to be in mountains. This fourth additional sense in which Muir thought of himself as a mountaineer is what gives his writing about them such uplifting vitality. As mentioned in chapter 9, Ruskin titled a chapter of *Modern Painters* "The Moral of Landscape" (Ruskin 1903, 5:420), and Muir knows that the moral quality of his life is being shaped by his relationship with this high Sierra landscape. This sense he explained as "an infinity of mountain life. How complete is the absorption of one's life into the spirit of mountain woods. No one can love or hate an enemy here, for no one can conceive of such a creature as an enemy" (Badè 1924; *LL* 205). Of course, Hetch Hetchy Valley and Muir himself were to have their enemies in the future and Muir would learn to fight them through the joint strength of the mountaineers who formed the Sierra Club. But by then he knew in a positive sense what he was defending and that he was defending it for future generations in the newly coined concept of a national park.

The only time when Muir was to write in an alienated sense about Yosemite Valley was at a time when it seems that a human relationship in the valley had got out of hand. Elvira Hutchings, the wife of the owner of the hotel for whom Muir worked, had, it seems, intended to leave her husband for Muir as a result of the relationship that developed while her husband was in Washington, D.C., pursuing his land claim for his property in the valley. At the end of the long letter to Jeanne Carr in which Muir writes of having no enemy in the mountains, he states, "I have not seen Mrs Hutchings and hope I shall not." This sentence, which William Frederic Badè tactfully cut from *The Life and Letters of John Muir* and has only recently been published (Gisel 2001, 250), helps to explain Muir's mood when he wrote earlier in the same letter, "No one of the rocks seems to call me now, nor any of the distant mountains. Surely this Merced and Tuolumne chapter of my life is done" (Badè 1924; *LL* 206). This letter was written to Jeanne Carr in response to her urging Muir to write fewer letters and concentrate on books. So in this letter he also resolves to turn to writing more seriously, although he is daunted by the prospect: "how hopeless seems the work of opening other eyes by mere words!" It seems that these two causes for leaving this stage of his life in the valley ("down, town, work") might account for Muir's disconnected mood at the end of 1875. In fact, it was not until 1894 that Muir was able to send to Jeanne Carr his first book: "You will say that I should have written it long ago, but I begrudged the time of my young mountain-climbing days" (Gisel 2001, 303).

So when Muir wrote late in his life of his 1888 ascent of Mount Rainier that he climbed for "the acquisition of knowledge and the exhilaration of climbing," he has to qualify this with a statement that indicates his deepest sense of himself as a mountaineer: "Doubly happy, however, is the man to whom lofty mountain-tops are within reach, for the lights that shine there illumine all that lies below" (Muir 1918; *W-D* 970).

It is this Janus nature of the mountaineering experience that provides the background to the distinctive qualities in Muir's mountaineering writing. Muir conveys a sense of illumination derived from intense engagements with the highest rocks, snows, and storms that carries such meaning for mountaineers that it heightens their material lives at lower elevations. So, what is actually distinctive about Muir's writing as a mountaineer and how do his distinctive qualities compare with contemporary writing by American and British mountaineers of the Victorian era? Perhaps a prior question should be: Does Muir really have any standing as a mountaineering writer alongside the greatest of his American and European contemporaries

who produced popular books such as Clarence King's *Mountaineering in the Sierra Nevada* (1872) and Leslie Stephen's *The Playground of Europe* (1871)?

In 1902 Muir wrote a letter listing six books that he says "I am now at work on." Number three on the list reads: "Next should come a mountaineering book—all about walking, climbing, and camping, with a lot of illustrative excursions" (Badè 1924; *LL* 343). In 1984 Richard F. Fleck prepared what he believed to be that collection of mountaineering essays, and it is still in print as *John Muir: Mountaineering Essays*. Actually, it seems likely that Badè took Muir's mountaineering book outline as the starting point for compiling the posthumous collection of essays he published in 1918 under the title *Steep Trails* (reprinted in *W-D* 865). But two of Muir's most famous mountaineering essays, which stand out for their gripping drama as "self-rescue" stories, had already been included in earlier books. The first of these, "A Near View of the High Sierra," Sir Edward Peck's admiration for which has already been mentioned, was published as a chapter in Muir's first book, *The Mountains of California*, in 1894.

This essay indicates the integration of the fourfold motives for Muir as a mountaineer. It is also an example of how Muir's post-pastoral holistic vision is expressed in his discourse. In this essay Muir's scientific observations are also expressed as religious experiences, an observation mentioned in other contexts in chapter 3. The language of the divine can lead, in Muir's hands, quite naturally to a recording of scientific names of plant species within the same sentence: "God's glacial mills grind slowly . . . while the post-glacial agents of erosion have not yet furnished sufficient available food over the general surface for more than a few tufts of the hardiest plants, chiefly carices and erigonae" (Muir 1894; *W-D* 318). The inexorable rhythm of this passage is part of its expression of the epic process while the scientific "agents" can, in the biblical phrase, "furnish food" for plants. Indeed, the glacial and the biological combine here to produce insights that today we would call ecological.

Similarly, the "new sense" described in this essay that enabled Muir to survive becoming cragfast on Mount Ritter indicated new capacities within the self to be carried beyond the mountains themselves: "every rift and flaw in the rock was seen as through a microscope, and my limbs moved with a positiveness and precision with which I seemed to have nothing at all to do" (Muir 1894; *W-D* 322). Muir knows that the "new sense" that came to him when he was sure that he "*must* fall" has its origins partly in his animal self ("instinct") and partly in "bygone experiences." But for Muir, this rock-climbing incident alone is not the purpose of the essay. He goes on to record

more "fine lessons and landscapes" in this three-day trip away from the landscape painters he had been guiding until they had found "a typical alpine landscape" to paint. So the essay, like the experience of ecological, religious, rock-climbing self-discovery, is actually framed by the demands of the aesthetic, or the commercial in the case of these professional artists.

The second famous essay was published in the book Muir was working on in his hospital bed when he died, *Travels in Alaska*. In the essay titled "The Stickeen River" Muir is persuaded to take along a companion, Samuel Hall Young, to climb Glenora Peak. When "within a minute or two of the top," as Muir is ahead kicking steps in loose rock around the shoulder of the highest pinnacle, his companion falls, dislocating both shoulders, Muir uses his own braces and necktie to strap Young's arms to his sides and gets him back to their ship eight starlit miles and seven thousand feet of descent away. In 1879 Muir made no record of this event in his notebook "and never intended to write a word about it; but after a miserable, sensational caricature of the story had appeared in a respectable magazine, I thought it but fair to my brave companion that it should be told just as it happened" (Muir 1915; *W-D* 746). Just as this chapter of *Travels in Alaska* is more about the nature of the Stikine River than the climbing accident, so the chapter of his reascent alone, "Glenora Peak," is what presumably Muir would have published without the incident, with its focus on the flora and fauna, accepting as a bonus "one of the greatest and most impressively sublime of all the mountain views I have ever enjoyed" (Muir 1915; *W-D* 764).

This was one of Muir's "great days" in the mountains: "When night was drawing near, I ran down the flowery slopes exhilarated" (Muir 1915; *W-D* 765). We all know those returns when "all the world seemed new born." But Muir's tendency toward personification mentioned in chapter 3 can lead to a final sentence such as this one: "The plant people seemed glad, as if rejoicing with me, the little ones as well as the trees, while every peak and its travelled boulders seemed to know what I had been about and the depth of my joy, as if they could read faces." This, together with Muir's religiosity, may be too much for the postmodern reader, although one might wonder what uninhibited expressions of the joy of inhabitation we have lost. On the other hand, Muir can be as terse as any modern mountaineering writer. He is not beyond the single-sentence ascent: "I therefore pushed on and reached the top" (Muir 1912; *W-D* 680) is all Muir has to say about his ascent of Half Dome up Anderson's newly installed rope after a snowstorm. Even in 1875, it seems, aid-climbing had little potential for literature in it. More significant to Muir were the three species of pines growing on the top

and "the curious little narrow-leaved, waxen-bulbed onion, which I had not seen elsewhere" (*W-D* 680). Muir's account of his ascent of Mount Rainier is laced with dry humor: "Here we lay all the afternoon, considering the lilies and the lines of the mountains with reference to a way to the summit" (Muir 1918; *W-D* 969). From what is now called Muir Camp, his party left after a cold night: "early rising was easy, and there was nothing about breakfast to cause any delay." Sometimes, it seems, the laconic Muir can counterbalance the linguistically indulgent Muir.

But perhaps the best indication of Muir's achievement as a visionary mountain scientist who sees and thinks with a post-pastoral unity that anticipates ecology, and includes himself in that unity, is to be found not in his books, or even in the essays that predate them, but in his journals. Richard Fleck has included in his anthology of Muir's mountaineering writing some passages from the journals of the early 1870s when Muir was far from thinking of himself as a writer of a mountaineering book: "I have a low opinion of books; they are but piles of stones set up to show coming travellers where other minds have been, or at best signal smokes to call attention. . . . No amount of word-making will ever make a single soul to *know* these mountains. As well seek to warm the naked and frostbitten by lectures on caloric and pictures of flame" (Fleck 1984, 103). Nevertheless, Muir is using words in this journal to understand the ecological unity at work within the living landscape of the Sierras: "Nothing is more wonderful than to find smooth harmony in this lofty cragged region where at first sight all seems so rough. From any of the high standpoints a thousand peaks, pinnacles, spires are seen thrust into the sky and so sheer and bare as to be inaccessible to wild sheep, accessible only to the eagle. Any one by itself is harsh, rugged, crumbling, yet in connection with others seems like a line of writing along the sky; it melts into melody, one leading into another, keeping rhythm in time" (Fleck 1984, 102).

Although this harmony is expressed in what seems to be aesthetic terms (writing, painting, and music are all evoked within a single sentence), what Muir has in mind is a dynamic underlying the "rock pavements" that is revealed by empirical science: "No wonder one feels a magic exhilaration when these pavements are touched, when the manifold currents of life that flow through the pores of the rock are considered, that keep every crystal particle in rhythmic motion dancing" (Fleck 1984, 103). When Muir touches rock in the course of his inquiry as a scientist mountaineer, he receives an exhilaration that confirms his being at home within this environment. When he expresses this exhilaration in the "word-making" of his journal, under

the heading of "The Sierra," he discovers that we derive our vitality from our direct contact with this mountain environment. At a time when we are finding ourselves uneasy in our relationship with wild mountain environments that we are overcrowding and polluting, we might need to forgive Muir a little for his enthusiasm in his discovery: "Wonderful how completely everything in wild nature fits into us, as if truly part and parent of us. The sun shines not on us but in us. The rivers flow not past, but through us, thrilling, tingling, vibrating every fiber and cell of the substance of our bodies, making them glide and sing. The trees wave and flowers bloom in our bodies as well as our souls, and every bird song, wind song, and tremendous storm song of the rocks in the heart of the mountains is our song, our very own, and sings our love" (99).

This ecstatic journal note might seem to be self-serving, but Muir's intention is to counter alienation and to capture a sense of the mountain inside the mountaineer. He believed that this kind of experience would lead to a respect for that environment as a "fountain of life" and to a desire to protect the integrity of wild mountains. By contrast Clarence King, whose *Mountaineering in the Sierra Nevada* (1872) is regarded as the classic of American mountaineering literature, pits himself *against* the mountains, emphasizing how his fortitude and courage overcome the seemingly impossible, in a style that tends toward the melodramatic. He tells a good tale, but his writing is now regarded as "frequently exaggerated and occasionally downright false" (Mazel 1991, 193). The centerpiece of his book is an attempt to climb Mount Whitney, which is climaxed by his embracing a "precarious ice-ladder" that has fallen down, he tells us, when King comes to descend it. The ice ladder is, says David Mazel, "completely fictional." "More serious," in his view, "is the way King never admits that he failed in his objective." King actually climbed Mount Tyndall and "must have been aware fairly early" in his approach that Whitney, the higher mountain, was many miles away. Yet King feigns surprise at the top of Tyndall to find that there is a yet higher peak. As a classic of the genre Clarence King's mountaineering book must be regarded as suspect not only in fact but in the self-centered motivation for distorting the facts. All Muir exaggerates is his ecstasy, if it is possible to make such an accusation.

Leslie Stephen, on the other hand, is self-consciously a model of elegant restraint and accuracy. After taking us on a climb to the Eiger, Stephen describes the peaks rising above the Aletsch Glacier before suddenly catching himself out: "So noble and varied a sweep of glacier is visible nowhere else in the Alps. Is it visible on the Eigerjoch? Did we really see Monte Leone, the

Jungfrau, and the Aletschhorn with our bodily eyes, or were they revealed only to the eye of faith?" (Stephen 1871, 57). The absurdities of exaggeration and subsequent inaccuracy in mountaineering writing are Stephen's greatest fear, so he not only comes clean but checks the evidence: "I regret to say that I have undoubtedly used a certain poetic licence—a fact which I ascertained by once more reaching the Eigerjoch in 1870, though not from the same side." The climbing writing that takes the reader to this pass is gripping in its detail and fluent in its style. When it comes to catching the beauty of the view, Stephen justifies his apparent exaggeration: "We had made a pass equal in beauty and difficulty to any first-rate pass in the Alps—I should rather say to any pass and a half. For, whereas most such passes can show but two fine views, we here enjoyed three. . . . We were on the edge of three great basins" (56).

But being in such self-conscious command of the language, Stephen is uneasy about the possible inadequacy of the word *beauty*. Undertaking moderate risk, wearying muscles and brain in overcoming obstacles, and taking in the exposure of mountain summits are necessary "to feel their influence enter the very marrow of one's bones" (Stephen 1871, 238). Stephen's great achievement is to marry a physical apprehension of mountains with that of the mind: "Even if 'beautiful' be not the most correct epithet, they have a marvellously stimulating effect upon the imagination." The mountaineer has "opened up new avenues of access between the scenery and his mind" (230). While appearing to be skeptical, Stephen actually plants the suggestion that beyond being "mere instruments of sport," mountains are, for mountaineers, sources of "more spiritual teaching."

Here we have been brought back to Muir's sense of the multiple dimensions of awareness that should be alive in one who is called "a mountaineer." Nowhere does Muir's writing suggest that mountains might be "mere instruments of sport." The notion of "sport" does not appear to be in his vocabulary. Muir's mountaineering writing serves the purpose that he declared to Jeanne Carr in 1874: "I care to live only to entice people to look at Nature's loveliness." For Muir the exhilaration of reading rock in order to climb it, of reading the skies to make crucial judgments, of taking in what a summit has to offer are not the activities of a sport, but of a deeper reconnection with nature that demands an alertness of all our faculties and all our modes of knowing. Despite his guardedness against "fine writing," Stephen remains an aesthete in his appreciation of the mountain environment. It is Muir who pushes at the boundaries of language to reintegrate in his writing the physical and the imaginative, the scientific and the spiritual,

the self-expanding act of climbing and the larger environmentalist imperatives. Perhaps it is time for us to rediscover what it meant to Muir to be "hopelessly and forever a mountaineer." Then we shall be closer to knowing what Muir meant when he said that "Going to the mountains is going home."

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Toward a Post-Pastoral Mountaineering Literature

I HAVE EMPHASIZED that John Muir did not write his first book, *The Mountains of California*, until he was fifty-five and that he began his career as a writer by writing for the magazines of his day. In drawing attention to the fact that Muir's books largely consist of a patchwork of articles drawn from notebooks, journals, and letters to friends, I have suggested, in chapter 3, that it is clear that this shorter mode of writing was his natural form. In the introduction to my book *The Joy of Climbing* (Gifford 2004, 9), I argue that the magazine article and the club journal essay are the natural forms in which to explore the rock-climbing experience.

Many mountaineering books published in Britain today are straining to sustain themselves as books and are really extended articles, or a splicing of articles. Joe Simpson's book *The Beckoning Silence* (2002) became an automatic bestseller, but it transparently displayed its joins, even to the extent of incorporating a blurb Simpson had written for the dust jacket of another book (Simpson 2002, 129). The continuing success of anthologies of shorter writing such as *The Games Climbers Play* and *Classic Rock*, both published in 1978 and still in print, suggests that, rather than book-length writing, the essay is *the* form for the various kinds of mountaineering experience. Or they demonstrate that climbers have short attention spans for reading, which amounts to the same thing. A book that admits that it is a series of linked articles, such as David Craig's *Native Stones* (1987), seems the most honorable and effective kind of mountaineering book.

In this chapter I consider what might be the features of a post-pastoral mountaineering literature for writers of the future by adopting a three-stage strategy. First, a consideration of the attitude of the editors of the outdoor press toward submissions of poetry is particularly revealing. This is not just a special case, but an issue that represents the broader tensions and separations maintained by the culture of British and American mountaineering writing. Second, I offer a brief history of those different tensions in

the British literature in order to, third, propose some future developments in climbing writing that might be informed by post-pastoral theory. This book is premised on the concept that the multiple modes of knowing that our culture has evolved require the freedom to use multiple discourses if knowledge is to be maximized. My hope is that the possible reconnections that might be made within climbing writing will offer some encouragement and inspiration to future generations of writers of this popular, but critically neglected, branch of literature about our relationship with the mountain environment.

Poetry and the Climbing Press

"There is no demand for poetry. We would just be wasting space in publishing it." This was the frank commercial judgment of Michael Kennedy, then editor of the U.S. magazine *Climbing*, reported to me by Allen Steck when I began researching this issue in 1987. Since then, nothing has changed and this statement still reflects a feeling that has been taken for granted by UK climbing magazine editors for a long time. "Poetry isn't where climbers are at," Ken Wilson, the founder of *Mountain* magazine, barked at me over a decade ago. This is still the common attitude of influential editors of, not just the magazines, but the anthologies mentioned in the opening of this chapter, such as Wilson's own books *The Games Climbers Play* and *Classic Rock*. When I mentioned this to my climbing partner, Norman Elliott, he quickly became incensed at Wilson's statement: "I resent that kind of blanket censorship by publishers of climbing writing. It's typical of the conservatism of the publishers playing safe. Their assumption that poetry won't interest readers and therefore won't sell, however good it may be, deprives ordinary people of ever seeing the best climbing poems and making up their minds for themselves. I'm not a poet, so when I see a poem that I like by a friend, say one of David Craig's poems, I think, 'Now why can't I buy a copy of that in a well-produced climbing magazine?' If the editors think that the majority of mountaineers aren't in the sport partly for the aesthetics of the experience, they've got it wrong."

Actually, the same could be said about UK book publishing. The same Ken Wilson, as the publisher of the anthology *Mirrors in the Cliffs* in 1983, allowed the editor Jim Perrin only two poems among almost seven hundred pages of prose. What, one might wonder, had changed since Wilfred Noyce's popular anthology *The Climber's Fireside Book*, which in 1964 was distinguished by poems from a wide range of sources (even if most them

were graduates of Cambridge University: see Gifford 2006)? In 1985, what is still the only anthology of British mountain poetry, Hamish Brown and Martyn Berry's *Speak to the Hills*, was sadly pleading for subscribers in order to get published. Yet over three hundred magazine readers sent poems to Hamish Brown for this book after a single invitation in a climbing magazine. In fact, so many of the poems offered were set in Scotland that an earlier publication of *Poems of the Scottish Hills* was made in 1982. Both of these collections were published by an academic press, Aberdeen University Press, yet the contributors of their contents were clearly readers of the climbing magazines. So, given this number of mountaineering poets, just what is it about poetry that makes the climbing press so uncharacteristically nervous?

Allen Steck, coeditor with Steve Roper of the U.S. magazine *Ascent*, which developed into an irregular and remarkable book, admitted to me that, for them, "a significant problem has been a lack of editorial skill in selecting the best poetry from the average." Michael Kennedy also said, "I don't know enough about poetry to judge it." But fear of the unknown and a little mystique has not usually prevented climbers from taking a risk, and instinctive assessment of risk for a small part of one page is not beyond the climbing editors. Of course, a poem has got to work for an editor, although not necessarily all at first reading. In fact, to be worth publishing, a poem ought to be one that demands to be read again. The criterion for such an instinctive judgment should be that the poem catches the spirit of the sport in an original way. This is what Michael Roberts referred to in his essay (reprinted in *Mirrors in the Cliffs*, giving that volume more words about poetry than examples of the practice) as the difference between "the poetry of mountains rather than the poetry of mountaineering" (Perrin 1983, 661). Poetry set in mountains is not the same as what is recognizably a climber's poem.

But the cultural mystique of poetry remains a problem. For those who don't read poetry much, this is often perceived as the "difficulty" of poetry. Again, Michael Kennedy articulated the outdoor editor's perception: "Poetry is too demanding, too difficult to understand for the average reader." I'd claim that poetry that is concrete, direct, and accessible enough to be interesting at first reading is instinctively recognizable by climbing editors and most of their readers. But dare editors trust their judgments about this kind of poetry? If there is not a community of climbing opinion on which to test these judgments out, as there is for other climbing writing, this is because poetry is in a catch-22 of the editors' making. Nobody can discuss it because it isn't published, and it isn't published because it is not talked about. In fact, the reason for the editors' reticence lies deeper than this. It is

rooted in the development of climbing culture itself and a current tension between a "narrowing" and a "broadening" within the culture on both sides of the Atlantic that can be traced, for example, in the recent British history of the literature.

Only in the last decade has British climbing writing begun to emerge from what might be called "the Rock and Ice era." It is hard to underestimate the enduring cultural impact of the postwar working-class generation represented by Joe Brown (1930–) and Don Whillans (1933–1985). The Rock and Ice Club, of which they were a part, created an image of men who said little, wrote nothing (certainly not poetry), but acted eloquently (see Perrin 2005). That they were men was important; poetry would certainly have been associated with the feminine and weak-mindedness. They were cut off by their class from the climbing establishment of their day and rejected the establishment's romantic culture that was perhaps best typified by the poetry of Geoffrey Winthrop Young (now best known for the poem "The Cragsman," in Winthrop Young 1936, 129–30) and later in Wilfred Noyce's 1964 anthology. The perception still persists that poetry is the antithesis of Rock and Ice culture and therefore unacceptable in the heroic tradition of postwar British climbing culture. This is one of the many myths that are the legacy of the Rock and Ice era and it is an implicit assumption that poetry will always be pastoral in nature, a theme to which I return in the second part of this chapter.

Of course, although romantic poetry was associated with the "educated class," poetry itself was never dead in working-class climbing culture. Tom Patey, for example, knew that it was alive in songs, and his own irreverent, antiromantic verses stand as perhaps the only poetic achievements of the Rock and Ice era, published at the back of his posthumous book, *One Man's Mountains*, in 1971. The fact that, in its own time, this "Verse," as it was titled, would not have been recognized as poetry, indicates how close the culture came to throwing the baby out with the bathwater. (It is interesting to note that the Rock and Ice inhibitions did not reach the nonindustrial, less macho, South West of the country. Poems appeared in guidebooks to Cornwall published by A. W. Andrews, who was himself a poet, in 1950 and by Peter Biven, who was influenced by the climbing critic and poet Al Alvarez, in 1968.)

Further, the myth may have disguised a reality revealed by Geoff Milburn in an anecdote published in the 1985–86 *Climbers' Club Journal*. Milburn recalled coming across Don Whillans at a bar and told this story with all the expectations created by the Rock and Ice myth:

> Whillans said, "Does your dad write poetry?"
>
> Well that was it, definitely a dobbing job. If I said "yes" I was as good as dead, yet if I told a lie to Uncle Don he would find me out and pounce. I paused, swallowed hard and said a silent prayer.
>
> "Er, well actually, er, yes," I finally admitted slightly defiantly. (Might as well go down fighting even if he did call me the son of a willy-woofter.)
>
> The silence was unbearable as he swayed slightly from side to side and I had time to check that there were no pint pots within reach. His punch came like lightning and yet he could have knocked me down with a feather.
>
> "Well, I like it. I've got his book and I think it's great."
>
> (Milburn 1985–86, 179)

The damage done to British climbing culture by the Rock and Ice myth was summed up by Norman Elliott in a conversation about this anecdote: "Their racism, sexism, cynicism, and satire cut us off from the whole area of emotional expression of the sport."

It is worth examining the evidence for this in the literature, because it is only the further narrowing of a strain already present in British mountaineering literature that has always run counter to the romantic. The qualities that the Rock and Ice era *has* contributed to the literature can reveal the key to current fears about poetry. One need look no further than the prose of Tom Patey and the way his stories are told with a terse humor of understatement. His essay about getting up as far as the Second Icefield on the North Face of the Eiger he titled "A Short Walk with Whillans." Patey's is a style of ironic narrative drama that has continued through the writings of Robin Smith (Wilson 1978, 45), to those lampooning essays by Mike Thompson about Chris Bonington's early expeditions (344), to Paul Pritchard's *Deep Play* (1997). But what is so significant about this strain of ironic understatement in British mountaineering writing that can be traced through the writing of H. W. Tilman (1983) back to the Victorian academic humor of Whymper's book title, *Scrambles amongst the Alps* (1871)? It is a distracting curtain drawn across the full expression of the emotions. This characteristic humor of understatement actually represents a deep fear of risking overstatement, such as might be found in romantic mountaineering poetry. The persisting horror for climbing editors is an embarrassing outpouring of emotion indulged, celebrated, explored by poetry. Here is the sad paradox concerning climbers, who might regard themselves as an uninhibited, adventurous, wild-at-heart lot, being inhibited by poetry's threat of an open, uncontrolled display of emotion.

The key concept here is "control." It is a word that touches the heart of the sport. Testing the edge of control is what climbing is about. If there is no risk, no climbing takes place. Between control and risk is the field of personal action, a matter of degrees of judgment for each climber based on ability, experience, the conditions, her judgment of him, and his judgment of her. Ironically, it is this kind of experience that poetry is good at exploring—the subtle, intense, and complex experience. Poetry is *the* form in which to examine the edges of experience on the edges of the earth. Poetry is about the control of language under pressure, with the full intelligence and imagination in play. But fear about poetry being out of control, as weak poetry will be, should not inhibit editors from considering language that does face that challenge.

When I began thinking about this issue twenty years ago, I might have pointed to the best prose writing in the United States as having escaped these inhibitions. But it is still the case that this has not carried through to the open reception for poetry in climbing publishing in the United States, as can be seen in the first twelve issues of the relatively new U.S. magazine *Alpinist*. But there is a sense in which British prose has learned from the more emotionally expressive U.S. models. The Americans have never been much good at H. W. Tilman's summit reticence with Eric Shipton: "I believe we so far forgot ourselves as to shake hands on it" (Tilman 1983, 248). When Americans fall out on expeditions they return to write books that say so, a kind of book in which John Roskelly used to specialize (Roskelly 1991). And as more women have come into the sport in all its forms there has been a willingness to write in a way that transcends macho repression. Arlene Blum's *Annapurna: A Woman's Place* (1980) was a landmark in this development. But male writers in the United States have been more willing to reveal an emotional expressiveness in their mountaineering writing, and UK male writers have probably learned from this. Wherever they come from, cultural shifts have taken place here. It is unthinkable that Paul Pritchard's second book, about his painful process of recovery from his accident, *Totem Pole* (1999), would have been publishable during the Rock and Ice era. (Much of what David Craig wrote in *Native Stones* that is critical of this era is now out of date, he will be delighted to acknowledge.) In our own era, Joe Simpson is able to express his deepest angst and fears, although not love, it should be noticed ("The mountains had made me selfish and I could love no one entirely because of them" [Simpson 2002, 202]). We appear to still be trapped in the stereotype that it is the women novelists Rosemary Cohen, Alison Fell, and Rosie Thomas who have done this in British climbing culture in our time. The shift has gone so far in prose and stopped, apparently.

So how might we recover so that we can accept the aesthetics in the athletics and the emotion in the motion? How can we move toward acceptance of both a full range of training techniques and a full range of literary forms to express our complete experience of the sport? Can we ever expect to see poetry as a regular feature of the U.S. and UK climbing magazines and anthologies, having a natural place alongside the narratives, news, and visual aesthetics? We seem to be at a turning point in the conception of the broad, inclusive sport of "mountaineering" that has come down to us from the Victorians (who also practiced in preparation for mountaineering what are thought of as modern branches of the sport: bouldering, indoor climbing, climbing buildings, and the top-roping of problems) and from John Muir's fourfold concept of "the mountaineer," which includes being at home on the steep edges of the earth, as detailed in chapter 10. The issue of the "narrowing" or the "dividing" of the sport and its specialties (sport climbing, bouldering, trad climbing, waterfall ice, mixed, and dry tooling, to name but a few) is not unconnected to the development of its literature. Where might we look for signs of future development if we took poetry as a test of tolerance within the culture?

First, it should be recognized that there has been a shift in the nature of climbing poetry itself following the rejection of romanticism. Frankly, much escapist, romantic poetry was to be found in the 1985 collection *Speak to the Hills* and many reviewers who wanted to welcome the project were appalled by the lack of editorial selection on display. Wordsworth was our first rock-climbing poet who was part of a gang of kids encouraged to find ravens' eggs in exchange for four pence for each egg from the nearest church warden. In 1783 the thirteen-year-old Bill Wordsworth was in a group attempting to reach the raven's nest on Yewdale Crags near Coniston when their leader became cragfast and help had to be called from a nearby farm (Thompson 1970, 211). But Wordsworth's poetry about climbing had a telling precision that has remained a hallmark of the best climbing poetry and is far from escapist and self-indulgent. In detailing his collecting of ravens' eggs in *The Prelude* Wordsworth has obviously been engaged in the real thing, hanging "by knots of grass / And half-inch fissures in the slippery rock / But ill sustain'd" (1805, I.341–44). The practical details that epitomize British rock climbing are all present in these lines: slippery rock given interest by the presence of the vegetation and the raven. So the origin of our climbing poetry from our leading Romantic poet was not what we now call "romantic" in nature.

More closely associated with what we now think of as romanticism is Leslie Stephen writing as a Victorian alpinist: "I have, I hope, said enough to

show that the mountaineer . . . is not a mere scrambler, but that he looks for poetical impressions" (Stephen 1871, 241). Struggling to express the intellectual and aesthetic aspects of the sport, Stephen finds a vague phrase that has come to represent the worst in mountaineering poetry—"poetical impressions." Between the two extremes of Wordsworth and Stephen there flowed the poetry of Winthrop Young, I. A. Richards, Michael Roberts, Menlove Edwards (in Perrin 1985), and Wilfred Noyce. Today, the best mountaineering poetry is less "poetical impression" and closer to Wordsworth's attentive precision in its representation of the activity. It also usually does more sharply defined thinking through the pens of Edwin Drummond, David Craig, Hamish Brown, and Kym Martindale, for example.

Second, poetry continues to find a necessary expression in the culture from time to time. It has not been entirely negated by repressive tendencies in postwar climbing culture, as the following examples show:

- Rock and Ice member Dennis Gray published poems in the 1986–87 *Climbers' Club Journal* when secretary of the British Mountaineering Council. He has recently published a collection of climbing poems (Gray 2002).
- Between 1993 and 1996 three collections of poetry were entered for the Boardman Tasker Award for the best mountaineering book of the year (by Kathleen Jamie, Kym Martindale, and myself).
- Following the earlier precedents in Cornwall, a poem was published in Kevin Eloury's 1992 guidebook to *Jersey Rock* and in the 1996 BMC Peak District guidebook to *Chatsworth* (Radcliffe 1996).
- Poems continue to appear as a rarity in the magazines, although nothing has rivaled the collection of poems published in *Mountain* 117, in which Johnny Dawes showed that a top activist could express athletics in poetics, given a little magazine space.
- Poems have played an important role in two significant books of prose about climbing: Edwin Drummond's *A Dream of White Horses* (1987) and David Craig's *Native Stones*.

The latter book contained a poem that was rejected by a magazine editor and offers a chance to see the kind of poetry we have been deprived of by our nervous editors. Of course, one poem cannot carry the weight of all my arguments, but this poem does seem to me easily recognized as a controlled and concentrated celebration of a climber's physical relationship with the rock. The wit of the last line deflates any pretension to grand

claims or suggestions of the mystical. This is not to say that the poem lacks the essential sensibility that distinguishes poetry from prose. Indeed, the combination of the poem's raw facts and inner responsiveness exemplifies the poet Norman Nicholson's assertion that "if the hills are an escape at all, they are surely an escape back to reality" (Brown and Berry 1985, viii).

Into Rock

He stretched to fit the rock
He crouched and eeled to fit the rock
Thinned and flexed to fit the rock
Spreadeagled on its smelted plates
Feeling his fingers hone to claws

He chimneyed up the gigantic split,
Sitting in air like an ejecting pilot
While the sky out there
Blazed at him and the granite ground his spine,
Then surfaced from the fissure like a mole

Bearing the chimney's pressure in his hunch
Its rising in his springing tendons
Its darkness in the gleam behind his eyes

Bearing the face's crystals in his fingerprints
Its cracking torsions in his wrists
Its drop in the air beneath his insteps

It moulded him. He was its casting.
His body was kneaded to its bas-relief.
His brain infolded, mimicking its strata.
And when he called, and the echo heard his note,
It parodied his language. (Craig 1987, 6)

Pastoral, Anti-Pastoral, and Post-Pastoral Mountaineering Literature

When Sir Jack Longland opened the Al Rouse Memorial Library in Sheffield on 14 May 1987, he warned the librarians, "These climbers, they write and they write and they write, far more than in any other sport. They

will demand ever more shelves and storage space, pushing all else aside and may even be a threat to Sheffield's Town Hall itself" (*High* 56 [July 1987]: 13). It certainly seems to be true that, in Britain, to climb is to want to write about it, and that, in turn, means wanting to read the writings of others. The United Kingdom sustains two specialist climbing magazines that between them have an estimated readership of 75,000, according to one former editor. More words must be published about climbing each year than new moves are made on British crags. More new mountaineering books are appearing now than ever before. Each publisher's list now blossoms each spring with a new biography or a new anthology, an older climber's collected essays or a young climber's commissioned diary, classic climbs, classic walks, classic cafés, a crag history, a club history, a pub history, extreme rock, hard rock, soft rock, a prize-winning novel, a self-published pamphlet of poems, or an instructional manual on how to walk ("KEEP CALM—if you are going to fall you will anyway so there is no point in worrying about it," advises Bill Birkett in *The Hill Walker's Manual* [1988, 69]). In addition to all this commercial writing, at least six clubs, according to Harold Drasdo (2003, 127), publish a (more or less) regular journal. There are even journals cheaply published to be informally circulated between friends who are not members of a club, such as *Loose Scree*, for example. Why does British climbing culture produce this desire to write and read about it instead of doing it?

In 1991, writing for the French magazine *Vertical*, I titled an article about British mountaineering "L'Ecrit et la Pluie" ("The Writing and the Rain"). The British tend to blame everything on the weather, I argued, and perhaps we could do so to explain all this writing. The British climber's search for a perfect Scottish winter, an English summer, a Welsh spring, an Irish dry spell, certainly provides plenty of time for writing, together with plenty of "stories to tell" by way of what the English call "epics" (or what the Scots would call "a good day out"). A number of British climbers have suddenly shot to fame from an unliterary background and found themselves to be "writers" on the basis of a single book written between spells of climbing, and a second book from a big publisher has followed. The names of Paul Pritchard and Joe Simpson have been invoked here already. But the beginnings of this avalanche of mountaineering literature are easily explained by the opposite being the case.

The earliest British alpinists were scholars of English literature who wrote about their new sport as an escape from their professional business of writing about other people's writing. This tradition has continued from Leslie Stephen, who was by profession a Victorian literary critic, to Al

Alvarez, former literary editor of the *Observer* newspaper, to the young Manchester University English student Ed Douglas (later to be editor of the *Alpine Journal*, mountaineering journalist, and author of several books), who in 1987 started the magazine *On the Edge*. The notion of romantic escape to the wild, steep places of the continent for eccentric purposes dominated British climbing and its writing for a century up to World War II. Wordsworth's friend Coleridge (the originator of British climbing prose, as Wordsworth was of climbing poetry) had felt that a poem he had written after climbing in the Lake District was too grand to be given such a modest location. "The Ideas etc. are too disproportionate to our humble mountains," so he titled the poem "Hymn before Sunrise, in the Vale of Chamouni" (Coleridge 1912, 376; see Craig 1987, 133).

Really the last romantic book about mountaineering in Britain was written during World War II in a prison camp, recalling bold prewar pioneering routes described in what is, at times, an almost visionary style. W. H. Murray's *Mountaineering in Scotland* was published in 1947. After a first winter ascent of the Rannoch Wall of Glencoe, Murray recalled looking out over the open moor below. He wrote that "height and distance were a sparkling wine poured to the mind from a rock decanter" (Murray 1947, 32). Such self-conscious play with language recalls constructions of a literary Arcadia. Indeed, this romantic strain of our literature might well be described as performing a classical pastoral function of idealization for a largely urban audience, as the Rock and Ice Club might have suspected. A modern extension of this function can then be seen in the self-idealizing wordplay produced by the self-conscious prose of Edwin Drummond (1987) and Jim Perrin (1986). They flaunt their self-obsession with a linguistic brio that claims an idealization of their climbing experience, offering, by presumption, a pastoral to less able, more humble climbing readers who are confined to a mundane experience of the sport.

It was really not until after the war that the Rock and Ice Club brought a recognition that the greatest achievements by British climbers could be performed on the small crags outside the industrial cities of Britain. And now the reaction against the romantic, pastoral heritage of the literature by the tight-lipped Rock and Ice era can be recognized for what it really is: simple anti-pastoral. Reference to this understated anti-pastoral writing in the case of Tom Patey has already been made, but it is interesting to note that one of the modes of the British strain of anti-pastoral writing was often to be found in our guidebooks. It is a mark of the British preference for words, that diagrammatic "topo" guidebooks to UK crags have never been as popular as

they have been in other countries. The British even anthologize route descriptions, thus displaying, in an anti-pastoral spirit, a literary delight in the most functional form of climbing writing. The following was included in *The Games Climbers Play* from the 1937 guidebook to Tryfan and Idwal by Menlove Edwards: "Soapgut. Hard Severe in nails which are proper, a good deal easier in rubbers, perhaps only Very Difficult. No deviations by desire or apparent possibility. Now it is clean it has become easier but it is still an inspiring line, although only really a drain" (Wilson 1978, 246). The 1989 guidebook to *Yorkshire Gritstone* began in a frankly anti-pastoral vein: "Yorkshire is a terrible place. The climate is appalling—horizontal rain, vertical gloom and frozen ozone. As for the rock, it's green, slimy, not worth travelling to, climbing on, or even bolting. This is no place for lycra, meusli or stickies: this is ten pullovers, fourteen pints and nailed boot country. Go West young climbers, or East or North or even South" (Desroy 1989, 5). This could have come from the fictional anti-pastoral pen of G. J. F. Dutton, whose satires regularly appear in the journal of the Scottish Mountaineering Club and have been collected in two books, *The Ridiculous Mountains* (1984) and *Nothing So Simple as Climbing* (1993).

So what might be the features of a post-pastoral mountaineering literature that gets beyond the closed circle of the pastoral and the anti-pastoral? For the first International Festival of Mountaineering Literature in 1987 I asked a writer, the late Dave Cook, to reflect on the state of climbing writing. In his keynote address to the festival, which he titled "Running on Empty," he argued that climbing writing had so narrowed in its focus that it had become separated from the realities of the contextual lives of climbers. The writing, he said, "urgently needs to take on more fuel—the interconnections between climbing and everything else we do . . . the insights of feminism . . . a bit more poetry even. Above all climbing needs to risk pressing the hyper-space button" (Gifford and Smith 1984, 11–12). This immediately became the manifesto of the festival, which has featured in every program (over nineteen years to date) poetry and writing by women climbers and writers who are exploring the corners of hyperspace that give the activity new meanings or new forms. But three aspects of Dave Cook's challenge to writers seem to offer a way forward for climbing literature that might be recognized as post-pastoral.

First is an awareness of the mountain and crag environments as ecosystems rather than playgrounds. In 1871 Leslie Stephen titled the book in which he made the case for a pastoral seeking for "poetical impressions" by alpinists *The Playground of Europe*. One result of the development of this

playground for Europeans is the physical degradation of the very source of those "poetical impressions." But an appreciation of aspects of the ecosystem and even a sensitivity to its vulnerability can be found in British climbing literature from time to time. Janet Adam Smith apologized in the introduction to her 1946 book *Mountain Holidays* for delighting in "soldanelles, cows, haylofts and vin rouge, as well as peaks, passes and glaciers" (Adam Smith 1946, v). Evidence of concern for the mountains as environment is beginning to be found, in essays that address this issue directly, in the national mountaineering journals of Europe such as the British *Alpine Journal* (2002, 117–31). The editorial of the 2003 *Alpine Journal* registered the shock of the now all too evident effects of global warming on the melting Alps. But the writing that celebrates the activity itself has been slow to respond to what is now, elsewhere in our culture, a common environmental awareness.

Second, an awareness of the cultural contexts in which the activity takes place is often missing from the action. Much has been written by mountaineers about the cultures living in the mountains they have passed through, based on casual observation, but this is rarely absorbed into the meaning of climbing a particular mountain or rock face. The local meanings given to the activity of those taking part for local economic reasons have been neglected as a source of what Dave Cook calls the "fuel" that the writing can draw from. Part of that fuel would include a sense of the cultural history of mountaineering tourism in a specific place. Books like Edwin Bernbaum's *Sacred Mountains of the World* (1997) somehow never inform the writing about the activity. Mountain culture is maintained as a separate category. An illustration of the consequences of this is Jonathan Neale's book *Tigers of the Snow* (2002), which recovers a Sherpa perspective on the actions of both German and Sherpa climbers on Nanga Parbat in 1934. The German history of the expedition attributes motivations to Sherpa behavior that is not even represented in their language. On our home crags, Cook asked how writing was being encouraged from black and Asian British climbers. The answer remains a postcolonial silence. Dave Cook was always alert to the possibilities that the old divisions in the sport along class lines could be reproduced as a racist dimension to the sport, although there is no evidence that this has happened.

Third, Dave Cook was keen to bring to a literature with an undeniable macho history the insights of feminism. There is, of course, a parallel history of women writers on mountaineering that has been chronicled in several books, although none of these books has considered the literary qualities of these writers. But as more women have taken up rock climbing, especially

in the last two decades, more writing has come from women in a variety of forms: articles, novels, expedition books, and a magazine titled *She Sends: Celebrating Women Climbers* (http://www.shesends.com). There is still only one anthology of recent women's writing: *Rock and Roses*, first edited by Mikel Vause in 1990 and published in a second edition in 2000. It could now be claimed that at least an awareness of feminist issues has penetrated the writing of the sport in the last decade and that a postfeminist sensitivity in male writing might now be expected. Indeed, this third kind of "fuel" for climbing writing might be expected to come from wider gender issues in relationships on climbs from the pens of all climbers. For example, my wife, Gill Round, and I have been developing a series of articles in what we call "jointly gendered voices" in which we focus on the tension in our relationship on a climb together in alternately written paragraphs, giving a continuous narrative from a dialogue between "his" and "her" perspectives (Gifford 2004, 93–98). This is not a new form of writing in itself, but as a vehicle for an exploration of a relationship it is perhaps a new gender-focused use of the alternating-writers form.

These three sources of new "fuel" that Dave Cook suggested might be taken on by climbing writing would constitute key elements in a post-pastoral mountaineering literature. If the still-thriving tradition of British climbing literature is to escape the historical tensions of its pastoral and anti-pastoral forms, the post-pastoral offers a challenge to future writers for the outdoor magazines. Those who teach or study "nonfiction prose" in creative writing courses could also have something to learn from a study of the tensions in this literature and its long tradition in British culture. Those who might wish to aspire to become a mountaineering writer of John Muir's power and fluency have the same opportunities that he had in his day to begin by submitting work to the periodicals. The pages of the outdoor magazines are almost as full of unsolicited articles as they are of their regular columnists. Indeed, the magazines depend on a constant flow of writing from ordinary hill walkers, climbers, and mountaineers who have never thought of themselves as professional writers. In appendix C I have included my notes for students of climbing writing who want to get published in the outdoor magazines.

Thus the mountaineering branch of nonfiction prose, the mode preferred by John Muir, could be invigorated by the post-pastoral reintegration of our modes of knowledge, our multiple discourses, and our spheres of activity, as Dave Cook suggested for this particular kind of writing about our engagements with the mountain environment.

CHAPTER TWELVE

Post-Pastoral Practice at the Crossroads of Ecocriticism

In his recent review of ecocriticism Michael Cohen suggests that a number of debates and critiques within ecocriticism have brought the emergent discipline to a crossroads (Cohen 2004). He identifies questions about rural and urban nature, wilderness and environmental justice, ecocentrism and anthropocentrism, nature writing and Environmental Impact Statements, art and activism, "praise-song criticism" and "analytic criticism," the spiritual and the political, the pastoral and the toxic, ecology and criticism, alternative versions of ecology, local celebrations of landscape and commercial globalization, Deep Ecology and postmodern technology, old dogs and Young Turks. The British ecocritic Greg Garrard, who is still in the running to be categorized in Cohen's taxonomy as a Young Turk, concludes the first book to give an overview of the discipline, *Ecocriticism* (2004), by writing, "This book has moved from the ancient trope of pastoral to the contemporary contestation of the figure of the Earth, from Romanticism to postmodernism" (Garrard 2004, 147). "Ecocriticism," says Garrard, "is essentially about the demarcation between nature and culture, its construction and reconstruction. The ultimate logic of pastoral would be the hope that culture might be subsumed within nature" (150). It is hard to imagine what "subsumed" might mean here. Does this imply a return to an animal state in which instinct replaces conscience? Or does Garrard imagine a desire to return to a primitive pastoralism in which issues of global warming, or toxic waste disposal, could be forgotten in seasonal rhythms of hunting and gathering? Or is this a New Age pastoral in which culture is exclusively the worship of nature? For Garrard the pre-Romantic "ancient trope of pastoral" is now associated with Romanticism, but both, anyway, are inadequate to deal with the "contestation" rife in our postmodern lives. In this self-contesting stage of ecocriticism the notion of a post-pastoral practice offered by this book might seem modest, even rather conservative. But I would hope that

it can be seen to offer some positive ways forward in answer to some of the contestations currently being hurled through the crossroads of ecocriticism.

The reconnection of scholarship, criticism, creativity, and teaching within the life of an ecocritic seems a modest proposal. Yet, with the exceptions of Patrick Murphy (Murphy 2000, xiii, 191–214) and Glen Love (Love 2003, 62), one would hardly guess that most ecocritics actually spend any of their time teaching, or that new concepts and debates might present new challenges to their pedagogy. If the activism of university-based ecocritics is limited to their practice of writing ecocriticism and not their teaching, their audience and influence is limited indeed. One might begin to wonder if this were not actually more an egocentric than an ecocentric practice, a slightly offensive question, perhaps, which Dana Phillips would presumably welcome being applied to his book, *The Truth of Ecology*, believing that "ecocriticism ought to be less devoted to pieties: it ought to offend" (Phillips 2003, 241). Being more concerned with polemics than pollution, the contestations of Phillips ring a little hollow. To read his book one would not think it important to teach with an awareness that global temperatures are rising, for example. In the early days of ecocriticism, when dialogue was conducted without offense, and arguments could be made without the dubious tactic of using "Thoreau as a straw man" (181), it was assumed that sharing pedagogical ideas was going to be part of the project of ecocriticism. Lawrence Buell regards the founding of ASLE and its journal *ISLE* as "the inception point of the contemporary movement" of ecocriticism (Buell 1999, 700). In fact, *ISLE* had already been founded by Patrick Murphy when he offered it to ASLE as its official journal, and for the first three years *ISLE* contained a section for reports on "Classroom Practice." From volume 4 onward pedagogical essays have been rare, I suspect because, as is the case in the United Kingdom, the evaluation of research quality for academic promotion is actually weakened, ironically, by the inclusion of publications that engage with issues concerning teaching. When Buell suggests that ecocriticism is "more issue-driven than methodology-driven" he is not thinking of a pedagogical methodology; he could not be because ecocriticism has not been concerned to develop one. While the links between scholarship, criticism, and creativity have been closely maintained by *ISLE*, links with pedagogy have been neglected. In Taiwan, a conference called in 2000 to foster the development of ecocriticism in an environmentally aware country (where the minister for the environment quoted Wordsworth at length) invited an international panel to share experiences on "Introducing Ecocriticism into the University Curriculum." (My notes from that panel discussion are provided in

appendix A.) The fostering of an environmental awareness in university students was felt to be not only good in itself, but essential as a platform for the development of ecocritical work. The two case studies that have been described in this book might be seen to offer some ways forward for their respective age groups and curricula (structured open inquiry, integrated use of multiple modes of discourse and knowledge, direct engagement with an actual habitat, deconstruction of its human construction, celebration of its creative reconstruction, taking imaginative responsibility for its future management). But what informs these pedagogical essays is the "methodology" of post-pastoral practice.

Post-pastoral theory results from a critique of the traditions of pastoral and anti-pastoral literature, but it can also offer a critique of naive and escapist "realist" literature. I am mostly convinced by Dana Phillips's analysis of Annie Dillard's *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* as an example of this (Phillips 2003, 187–93), but I would point out that the postmodern literature he admires actually serves a fatalistic pastoral function by concluding that there is nothing to be done about its environmental agenda, which is the outcome of Phillips's argument about Don DeLillo's *White Noise* (Phillips 1998, 235–46). Post-pastoral might be seen to answer a number of the criticisms Dana Phillips and others have expressed about ecocritical practice. It is intended to offer a tentative working theory rather than dogma, to offer criteria for critique rather than a set of rules for the ecopolice. It is theory not theology, in Phillips's terms, but while it is alert to mystification, it is not cynical. Indeed, despite the problems that are raised by the kind of discourse analysis I have been practicing in this book, it is positive in providing a challenge to reading and writing to go beyond the pastoral practice of what Michael Cohen calls the "praise-song school" of criticism and of nature writing (Cohen 2004, 22). It begins by asking questions about awe as a counter to hubris, but it ends by examining attitudes toward responsibility to people and planet, so that it critiques religiosity while demanding accountability for the unavoidable choices of the "disturbance" of our everyday lives embedded in the life of the planet.

Within the last decade my notion of "responsibility to people and planet," which really had its root in ecofeminism, has come to be known as "the environmental justice movement" within ecocriticism. Ignored by Phillips, glancingly touched on by Garrard, but highlighted as a crucial point of development by Cohen, this most profound and dynamic development has demanded that multiple discourses become not only the subject of ecocritical activity but also its mode of analysis and intervention. Within a notion of

"proactive scholarship," analysis of the public language of institutional environmental debate should be linked to "the most important single literary genre, the letter to a governmental agency" (Cohen 2004, 24–25). This has been referred to in chapter 6 in relation to the final demand of Rick Bass's *Fiber*, where discourses become deliberately confused as art becomes activism. But it is Lawrence Buell who gives the most recent and best account of what I might now describe as the post-pastoral practice of the environmental justice movement (Buell 2005, 112–27). It was Buell whose work was so influenced by this new call for addressing the environmental needs of people and planet that he invented the study of the subgenre of "toxic discourse," as mentioned in chapter 1. In *The Future of Environmental Criticism* Buell suggests that in addressing the challenge of environmental justice for all species there is a need for ecocritics to think beyond the boundaries of discourses and discrete activities to reconnect with the culture in which political will is forged: "Unless ecocriticism can squarely address the question of *how* nature matters for those readers, critics, teachers, and students for whom environmental concern does not mean nature preservation first and foremost and for whom nature writing, nature poetry, and wilderness narrative do not seem the most compelling forms of environmental imagination, then the movement may fission and wane" (113). If this now sounds familiar at this stage of this book it is perhaps because I have been arguing that this is precisely the challenge that John Muir faced as his writing and his public life evolved, requiring a variety of modes of address and modes of being, from artist to scientist to conservationist to activist in evolving dialogue with each other.

Buell also suggests that one future for ecocriticism is "the reinterpretation of such thematic configurations as pastoral, eco-apocalypticism, and environmental racism" (Buell 2005, 130). This book's reinvention of "pastoral" as "post-pastoral practice" does not provide the methodological innovation that Buell points out as absent from ecocriticism's impact on literary criticism as compared with, say, deconstruction. But post-pastoral theory does provide a more coherent practice that reconnects separated forms of knowledge and their discourses. Post-pastoral theory cannot avoid being accused of utopianism any more than feminism could be, as, indeed, any positive agenda for asking questions about environmental issues must be today. But it is itself open to critique and revision. Meanwhile the global temperature goes on rising. In working with this awareness we also cannot avoid being accused of being apocalyptic, in Garrard's terms, although such reminders should only increase the sense of responsibility that the post-

pastoral demands. Garrard suggests that ecocritics must assess and then defer to scientific consensus, "even as they analyse the ways such results are shaped by ideology and rhetoric" (Garrard 2004, 107). But, as Buell points out, ecocritics have to go beyond the scientific to balance the moral and the aesthetic through the imaging of alternative presents and alternative futures (Buell 2005, 46).

Post-pastoral practice, as offered within this book, recognizes that there is more than one way to be a scientist just as there is more than one way to be a mountaineer. Muir as scientist and as mountaineer risked being marginalized by the serious thinkers of his day by doing his work in different discourses for different purposes, but most significantly as a social force for a changed attitude toward our home planet and its environments. As a populist writer he deliberately marginalized himself in the role of wilderness sage in order to dramatize an alternative to the way of life of most people in his time. This has had unfortunate results in that many people have come to think of Muir only in terms of the myth of antisocial Yosemite hermit that Muir himself created. But Muir's ultimate authority came precisely because he could deliver to several audiences—the botanist, the geologist, the politician, and the educated urban reader—from the basis of his fully integrated vision.

In his book *Cross-Pollinations: The Marriage of Science and Poetry* (2004), field scientist, ethnographer, nature writer, and poet Gary Paul Nabhan tells a story that is a parable for our times in a chapter titled, "Why Science Needs Poetry: Fitting New Metaphors to Nature When Old Clichés Fail." As an enthnobiologist Nabhan had learned the language of the Tohono O'odham people of southern Arizona so that he could ask elders for stories that might explain their uses of specific plants. One of his informants and friends, Ramona Mattias, chided him that he ought to be using his education to solve the mystery of why her people were dying of diabetes. Within a year she was dead herself. Twenty-five years of scientific studies of the problem had led to the dead end of genetic determinism and no solution. Then, reading a poem by Amy Clampitt one evening, he realized that the central metaphor of the poem informed both its subject and the metaphorical image, providing a new way of coming at his scientific problem. To cut a technically fascinating and rather moving story short, Nabhan made similes that enabled him to see that "desert plants everywhere have chemicals that control diabetes; once they are removed from the diets of indigenous people, the people are susceptible to diabetes" (Nabhan 2004, 55). Globalized fast foods had displaced an important form of connection between people and their

native plants. But Nabhan is an activist and so he collaborated with Tohono O'odham Community Action to "bring the fruits of our studies to those who most desperately needed them" with a "Desert Walk for Biodiversity, Heritage, and Health": "During the pilgrimage, twenty-four of us from four desert cultures subsisted entirely on native foods for two weeks. . . . all of us improved our blood sugar levels and lost weight" (57).

This is a contemporary story of several kinds of reconnection that might be sought by post-pastoral practice: science and arts, arts and activism, academic and indigenous values, heritage and health, biodiversity and human health, listening and curing. Post-pastoral practice "listens deeply to the source" through the changing evidence within the multiple discourses available to us and invites a more complex judgment than might otherwise have been possible. But its ultimate purpose is as a tool for making better choices, individually and socially, for the survival of our species in its contested, evolving, amazing, barely understood, but inescapable home.

APPENDIX A

Introducing Ecocriticism into the University Curriculum

(Previously published in an earlier version in *Green Letters* 4 (Spring 2003): 40–41 and on the ASLE Web site.)

Notes from a roundtable discussion at the Ecological Discourse conference at Tamkang University, Taiwan, October 2000. These suggestions were made by Scott Slovic, Patrick Murphy, and Terry Gifford.

1. Start from where you are:
   a. Whatever course you are teaching you may be able to introduce texts, or even take a thematic strategy in the selection of certain texts, that would offer the possibility of an ecocritical approach.
   b. If your texts are given by the course constraints it may be possible to raise environmental questions in discussing most of them.
   c. Try to introduce one ecocritical course when the opportunity arises, not necessarily with an explicit title, e.g. Poetry and Landscape.
   d. Courses in literary theory would now be incomplete without the inclusion of ecocriticism.
   e. Courses in literary theory should be tested for the theories' ability to answer questions about constructions of environment in literature.
2. Try to integrate toward an interdisciplinary delivery:
   a. within subject-specific courses, e.g. English, where there might perhaps be more integrated engagement with ecological discourse between language, literature, theory, creative writing, and composition—that is, different modes of speaking, reading, and writing.
   b. within a course when there might be an opportunity to invite one lecture from another discipline.
   c. within a planned team-teaching program with one or more sympathetic colleagues.
3. Creative writing courses offer great opportunities to make engagements with environments and ecocritical theory, theory informing practice, and practice demanding information. I began teaching at Bretton Hall College for a general

English degree that featured creative writing as an element in most courses, combining creativity with criticism. A program titled Poetry and Landscape was introduced. In a new creative writing bachelor's degree program the class metamorphosed into a second-level course that was titled Writing and Environment and provided an introduction to notions of environment explored through a wider range of forms and genres than just poetry. Students could follow this with a third-level course titled Creative Analysis of Environment.

4. Introduce a field course, even if it is a weekend outside of the course hours. Intensive focus on a different place, its literature, other forms of cultural constructions, and issues, using the journal as a learning tool, should deliver new questions about the familiar, as described in chapter 8.
5. Establish a reputation in a corner of academic culture by a regular event: conference, one-day colloquium, offering ecocritical panels, creating new awards.
6. Consider vocational as well as academic credibility in creating new degree titles at whatever level. In the United Kingdom now one would perhaps avoid "Nature" or "Pastoral" in favor of "Environmental." "Cultural Constructions of . . ." may be avoided in favor of " . . . and Communication," for example.
7. The regular reviews of the curriculum are an opportunity for junior staff to say to the chair of the department, "Look, we are falling behind if we do not include ecocriticism somewhere."
8. Courses designed for nonmajors can be popular and bring up numbers of students taught by the department. The twenty-five students in Patrick Murphy's course one year came from sixteen different disciplines.
9. Infiltrate the center; don't marginalize yourself. Invite the center's representative to give a lecture on, say, pastoral, and be inclusive: "Look, you're really one of us. You're an ecocritic."
10. Consider ways of contributing to junior and high school education by giving talks, taking field trips, and contributing to existing schemes like the John Muir Award Scheme in Scotland established in 1997.
11. Can you contribute to teacher training in your institution?
12. Join the wider conversation by joining ASLE and forming a branch. Ask ASLE for advice or regional contacts.
13. Bring together for just a day a small number of colleagues from different institutions and fields to share work in progress in research and teaching.
14. Very few publishers so far have a series dedicated to ecocriticism, and there are few books on ecocritical approaches within educational series. But there will be. Invite a colleague to shape a proposal with you.

APPENDIX B

Twenty-five Kinds of Post-Pastoral Landscape Poem

In chapter 8 I outline a field trip for a university course in Poetry and Landscape in which reading and discussion lead to creative writing challenges for the students. At particular sites in the Lake District I direct the note taking toward a specific poetic theme or form. Models to be improved on for each of these challenges are offered from my own published work. These are listed below (and the sites named) together with further challenges and examples to make a complete list of twenty-five kinds of landscape poems.

I argue in chapter 8 that the development of the notion of the post-pastoral as a tool for ecocriticism also becomes a challenge to the writer and to the teacher. If one's own writing tries to avoid the idealizing, nostalgic traps of the pastoral, so should one's teaching of the writing of poetry. If the post-pastoral provides a set of questions that one might expect good writing about the environment to address for the critic, these questions should become a challenge for the poet. It is to be hoped that a post-pastoral approach is evident in each of these poems offered as a starting point for students' own poetic explorations.

1. Process Poem—"Wall" (*Outcrops*, 36). Thirlmere exercise.
2. Relationship Poem—"Castlerigg Stone Circle" (*The Unreliable Mushrooms*, 17). Castlerigg Stone Circle exercise.
3. Ecological Amulet—"Island Amulet" (*Whale Watching*, 52). Castle Rock ledges exercise.
4. The Outer Mirrors the Inner—"Hutton Roof" (*The Unreliable Mushrooms*, 23). Castle Rock summit exercise.
5. Inside the Mountain—"Bat Charm" (*Outcrops*, 37). Gillerthwaite Cave exercise.
6. Map Names Poem (thanks to colleague Liz Cashdan)—"Upon the Dangers of Climbing Castle Rock of Triermain" (*The Unreliable Mushrooms*, 89). Wet day indoors exercise.
7. Ten Stations on a Walk (thanks to colleague Harriet Tarlo and to Thomas A. Clarke's "Paths and Fruits" in *Tormentil and Bleached Bones* [Edinburgh: Polygon, 1993]). Wet walk exercise.

8. Landscape Painting Poem—" 'Taylor Gill Force' by Ian Walton" (*The Unreliable Mushrooms*, 60). Painter's studio or art gallery visit exercise.
9. Leaving a Landscape—"Montara Meditation" (*Whale Watching*, 28). Loughrigg Terrace exercise.
10. Confessional Poem—"Elterwater Otters" (*The Unreliable Mushrooms*, 29).
11. Poem(s) Updating a Dead Writer—*Ten Letters to John Muir* (see the poems between chapters in this book).
12. Futuristic Poem—"Borrowdale Evolution" (*The Unreliable Mushrooms*, 35).
13. Workers in a Landscape—"The Charcoal Burner's Tale" (*The Unreliable Mushrooms*, 90).
14. Community Uses of a Landscape—"Cretan Post-Pastoral" (*The Unreliable Mushrooms*, 92).
15. Researched History—"Tophet Wall" (*The Unreliable Mushrooms*, 47).
16. Submit to Topography—"Gorges de la Vis" (*The Rope*, 41).
17. Politics in a Landscape—"Marginal" (*Outcrops*, 51).
18. A Tool or Object from a Landscape—"Ice Skates" (*Outcrops*, 41).
19. Poem for a Photograph—"Innishmore" (*The Unreliable Mushrooms*, 61).
20. The Song in Your Head—"Mountain Dulcimer" (*Outcrops*, 25).
21. Lament for a Person of a Place—"The Single Falling Stone, in memoriam Paul Nunn" (*The Unreliable Mushrooms*, 70).
22. The Outer Teaches the Inner—"What Bashō Could Say in Three Lines" (*The Unreliable Mushrooms*, 71).
23. Poem from an Interview—"Pat's Webbed Feet" (*The Unreliable Mushrooms*, 69).
24. Harvesting in a Landscape—"The Unreliable Mushrooms" (*The Unreliable Mushrooms*, 96).
25. Voicing an "Earth Warrior"—"English Earth Warriors" (*The Unreliable Mushrooms*, 75–78).

APPENDIX C

Advice for New Writers Targeting Outdoor Magazines

After consultation with various magazine editors over the years, I offer fifteen points of advice to potential writers for the outdoor magazines:

1. Keep a notebook and keep writing notes in it during and immediately after your trip. Mine is small enough to fit in a pocket, hard backed and laminated to keep off the rain. I personalize it with pictures when I laminate it and I have my name and address inside. I find it simpler to keep one notebook for everything I do, but I have prepared a special one for a long trip, putting some quotes inside along with passport number, credit card loss number, and flight details. You can write in pencil in a light rain in the United Kingdom. I have a bad memory and at the end of a long climb I have forgotten the features of the pitches, so I was grateful to my partner Tim Noble for insisting that I write a note on a piece of paper at each of the thirteen stances on our climb of the Miroir in Switzerland so that I could write about it later (Gifford 2004, 204).
2. Keep a scrapbook of good writing. Like any kind of writing the quality of your own work is influenced by the quality of your reading. Copy brilliant sentences and paste in the scrapbook models to be studied. Annotate what you have included. The journal is not an archive, but a tool for your learning, so don't be afraid to underline and scribble in the margins.
3. I need photographs to jog my memory so I take lots, especially contextual photos that might not mean much to others. As the professionals say, slide film is cheaper than going back again. But you can rarely sell your writing without one decent picture, so we all have to learn the basics and then learn to improve. Or climb with a photographer. Of course, she will be trying out this new lens/film/relationship and it will fail, so you have to take your own anyway. Remember that editors look at the pictures first and it influences how they read your writing. Prints save an editor the backbreaking work of holding a slide up to the light. Send originals only. Keep good records of what has been sent and returned.
4. When you come to want to write, you might consider whether this is for the audience of the club journal or for the audience of a specific magazine. If you are not an alert reader of the publication for which you are to write you will

misjudge the audience. A first draft might be written only for yourself. But when you submit for publication you are addressing a specific audience. It will help to eventually be able to write a first draft with that audience in mind. Generally, I submit to my club journal work that is too original, unusual, or risky to be accepted for a wider audience. Or work that is addressed to friends or contains inside jokes or information that I want to pass on to fellow club members I share through the club's journal possibly a year or two before I revise it for a general audience.

5. "Have you got a story to tell?" one editor always asks. The trick is finding what that story is if you didn't actually touch the void and survive. But first you have got to *want* to write. (If you feel you *have* to write, it will show.) About three or four times a year I have found that an experience has been so charged in some way that I want to explore it in writing. You might find "the story to tell" in a metaphor, or a search, or the route itself, or a relationship, or a crucial choice. The article should have a central focus or theme. The detail of the route, its essential character, should emerge, together with essential information and current tips, but the writing should have an overarching focus that should make it different in some way. Research can sometimes produce this, leading you to interview the first ascensionist, for example.
6. Sometimes the focus can be the form of the piece itself if it is a parody or written in a particular genre, like a myth. Editors are always on the lookout for a different form that can still tell a story. Of course, forms should be practiced by the writer just as much as anything else. And this might be the moment to say that genuine humor is the holy grail for editors. If you can find it, you're made.
7. Also needing some practice is the business of getting used to the standard length and then pacing the piece within it. One thousand to fifteen hundred words should get to feel the right length for what you are writing for UK magazines. For U.S. magazines, take advice from the editor. The first sentence is the crux. But grabbing the interest with the first sentence and sustaining attention toward a satisfying sense of an ending within fifteen hundred words takes practice.
8. A single sentence e-mail to the editor saying you are about to submit a piece on a certain route and would it be welcomed can save weeks of waiting for what the editor immediately knows will be a rejection because, say, there is just such a piece already penciled in for next month.
9. Don't waste too much time on a cover letter. Two sentences will do the job. Number pages and label everything. Submit hard copy and enclose a disk. Give a summarizing sentence of the content of the piece.
10. However tempted you are, don't offer the same material to more than one editor at once. Get an acceptance letter and know the rate you will be paid. You may need to keep this letter safe for up to two years, so know where you

put it. Sometimes a "pulling fee" will be paid if a piece has been accepted but not used.

11. After acceptance you have to be prepared to sit back and wait for between six months and two years. Don't hassle the editor, but inquire with one sentence once every six months.
12. If you find out that your article is in the pipeline for imminent publication check that your information is still current and forward corrections.
13. When your piece is published keep several actual copies and make some photocopies for friends. Getting back issues to give to grandchildren in years to come will be more difficult than you can imagine now.
14. Be prepared for a month's delay in the check arriving.
15. Finally, plan to do next what others are not. Ask editors what articles are in short supply. Find a climbing partner who is a photographer and not a writer.

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